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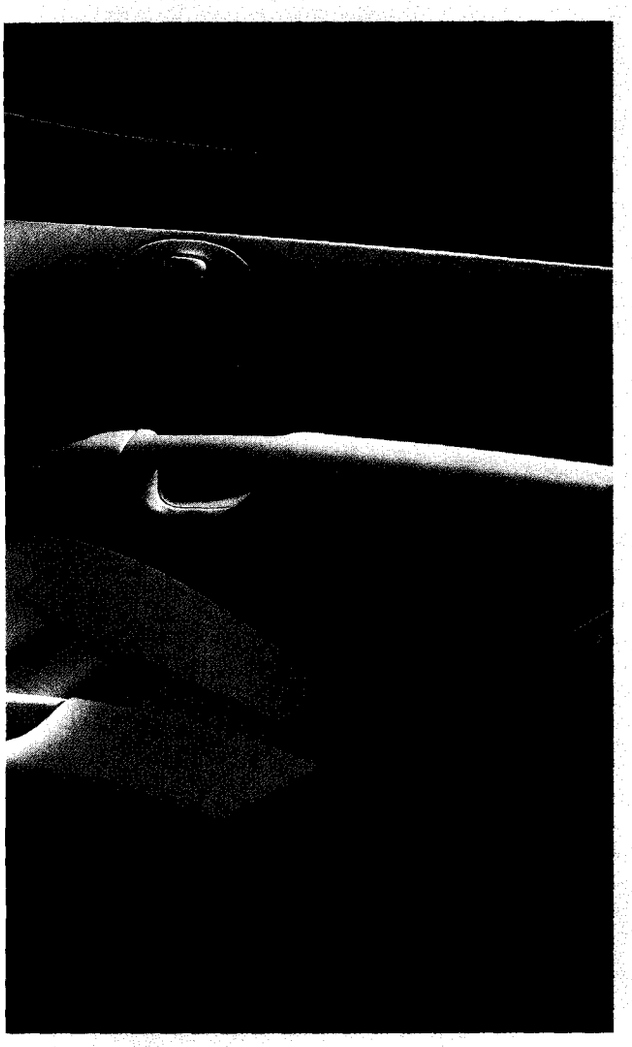

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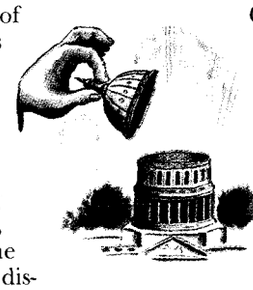
FROM WASHINGTON

Southern comfort

The budget stalemate has quickened Democratic hopes and Republican fears of a new congressional majority in 1996, but the fate of both parties is more likely to be sealed by the latest judicial battles over racial gerrymandering. Faithfully applying the Supreme Court's recent command that race can't be the "predominant factor" in districting decisions, a federal appellate court last week proposed to eliminate two of Georgia's three majority black congressional districts. Although embattled white Democrats are hailing the decision as a lifeline, it may only accelerate the realignment of the South and help propel the Republican Congress into the next century.

If the ghost of Lee Atwater were raised from the grave, it would cackle at the Republicans' knack for surpassing themselves in exploiting racial politics. In the 1980s, conservative Republicans forged a cynical alliance with black Democrats. Brandishing the Voting Rights Amendments of 1982, the Bush Justice Department required state legislatures (who are responsible for drawing new congressional districts every ten years) to create as many minority districts as possible after the 1990 Census. This deprived white Democrats of their most loyal constituents and contributed to massively polarized racial bloc voting that pushed white Southerners perhaps irrevocably into the party of Lincoln. In 1995, having achieved their realignment, Republicans now have the luxury of calling for the dismantling of the minority districts they recently insisted were compelled by law. And the color-blind Supreme Court has been happy to oblige.



The effects of racial redistricting on the Republican realignment are hotly contested; but Carol Swain of Princeton University conservatively estimates that the creation of fifteen black and eleven Hispanic districts after the 1990 Census cost the Democrats a total of seventeen seats in the last two elections. In Georgia, the shift was especially dramatic. Before the 1990 reapportionment, Georgia was represented by eight white Democrats, one black Democrat and Newt Gingrich. After reapportionment, Georgia gained one new seat and two new minority districts. The delegation now consists of eight white Republicans and three black Democrats.

On December 13, the U.S. Court of Appeals in Georgia proposed to eliminate two of the oddly shaped majority black districts and to replace them with six neatly shaped, majority white districts. By dispersing the most reliable Democratic voters, the Georgia court's plan could give white Democrats a chance to recapture the seats they lost in 1992 and 1994. But it may be too late to staunch the Republican tide. In the 1994 midterm elections, Southern white voters favored Republican House candidates by a margin of 65 percent to 35 percent. Based on a computer analysis of the new map, the Georgia Republican Party estimates that it would gain twelve points in one of the current black Democratic districts and twenty-six points in another. If the court's plan is, in fact, implemented, the Georgia delegation after the next election might conceivably consist of ten white Republicans and one black Democrat.

In other Southern states, the partisan effects of the Supreme Court's new standards could be similarly extreme. On December 5, the Court heard arguments about the constitutionality of minority districts in Texas and North Carolina. In Texas, two neatly shaped minority districts could have been drawn in Dallas in 1990, if only the Democratic incumbent in the adjacent district, Martin Frost, hadn't insisted on retaining black voters to protect his seat. If the Supreme Court strikes down the Texas plan, and tells the Texas legislature to create more compact districts, Frost could well be displaced by a Republican.

As a political strategy, of course, the attempt to protect Democratic incumbents with creative racial gerrymanders proved to be an ironic and embarrassing failure. In North Carolina, Democrats held an eight to four advantage before redistricting; by 1994, Republicans held an eight to four edge. But the Supreme Court's refusal to acknowledge that racial gerrymanders and partisan gerrymanders are two sides of the same coin

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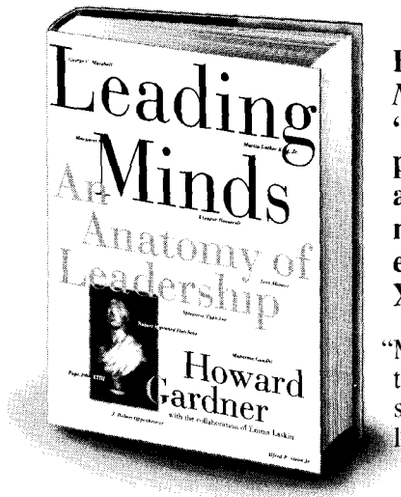
What do all great leaders have in common?



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A Weekly Journal of Opinion

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CORRESPONDENCE

Medicares

To the editors:

As a managed care executive in the rough-and-tumble market of Southern California, I nearly wept for joy reading Matthew Miller's "The Medicare Boom" (December 11, 1995). Finally, through all of our agonized health care debates, somebody has it right. Managed care implemented within a competitive market structure is the only option we have for saving Medicare, particularly as we baby-boomers reach elderly status and impose our ailing bodies on this system in record numbers.

Fortunately, many of us born after 1950 are thoroughly used to HMOs through our employers, and we are less likely to whine about managed care in the standard AARP mode; many of us think HMOs are a wonderful innovation. There is also a new crop of doctors who are not afflicted psychologically with pathological grief for the "good ol' days" of fee-for-service medicine, and who also embrace managed care practices as a means of ensuring quality while restraining costs. And many of them make a good living. Miller should ask Kaiser Permanente, for example, about the qualifications, enthusiasm and length of its waiting list for physician applicants.

It strikes many of us outside Washington that the leadership of both political parties has never had a clue about managed care or health care markets. Miller has expressed this well.

It's too bad Miller didn't spend a little more time examining the "Kremlinesque" methodologies of hospital reimbursement devised over the years by the geniuses of HCFA, including Gail Wilensky, the former HCFA chief Miller quotes, who seems to be trying to distance herself from the health care cost fiasco she and many others helped HCFA to engineer.

KEITH DIXON
San Diego, California

To the editors:

Matthew Miller accuses both political parties of ranting about the state of the Medicare program. Miller is doing a good bit of ranting himself.

Miller would like us to believe that he has presented a mountain of evidence as to why managed care could be the cure-all for the Medicare program. In truth, his only hard fact presented is that, in an analysis for THE NEW REPUBLIC, it was discovered that 15 percent of medical procedures could be purchased at a rate lower than Medicare's set rates. Unfortunately, this one solid fact just won't make the case for completely revamping the nation's largest health care program. Unless Miller is using a new form of math, rectifying those 15 percent of the cases won't save the entire program.

Miller fails to say that managed care has never been tested for its cost-saving effectiveness in a senior population, which as a whole requires more medical care than the general population.

It's too bad Miller didn't spend his time on a more constructive endeavor—analyzing other ways to reduce costs to the Medicare program, like controlling fraud and abuse; including state and local government employees in the program; re-evaluating Medicare payments for hospital capital costs and professional education; and reducing formula-driven overpayments for hospital outpatient surgery and radiology.

MARTHA A. MCSTEEN
Washington, D.C.

To the editors:

Even if Matthew Miller is right about Medicare paying doctors too much, which is highly debatable, that hardly proves that Medicare can easily be whacked by $270 billion, as the Republicans propose. Physician services only account for about 20 percent of Medicare costs, and GOP cuts in physician pay would only yield about $23 billion in savings. Most of the cuts would come out of the hides of beneficiaries ($57 billion in higher premiums) and hospitals and other institutional providers ($140 billion). Miller's doctor-pay data say nothing about the merits of hammering old people and hospitals.

Miller also contradicts himself. He rips the Democrats for "demagoguery" in their attacks on the GOP plan. But, at the very end, he concedes their main arguments—that the plan would slash care for the uninsured, ram seniors into HMOs, cause traditional Medicare to wither, leave sicker people in the lurch, ration high-tech treatments and offer a huge windfall to investor-owned HMOs. How can we "put aside for a moment," as he asks us to do, that all this is to give the rich a big tax cut?

DEBORAH MIHM
Chicago, Illinois

To the editors:

"The Medicare Boom" impugned my estimate of the gap between Medicare's physician fees and those of the average private payer. Please allow me to comment. First, averages do not apply to individuals. My national average number is no more correct for model HMOs than the national average weight is correct for

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fashion models. Second, averages are not minima. Your reporter asserts that some insurer in town pays $20 for a mid-level office visit. That may or may not be true, but it certainly is not typical.

If you want a reasoned and reasonable look at this issue, you could repeat what I said during your reporter's extensive phone interviews. The gap between Medicare and private rates has been shrinking, and for some payers, some services and some areas, private fees are below Medicare rates. Bruce Vladeck (the HCFA administrator) sees an opportunity for Medicare and has suggested moving to negotiated payment rates in those areas. But California and other competitive and overdoctored markets are not (yet) typical of the country; Medicare still pays physicians significantly less than the average private payer; and no one knows what will happen to this over the next seven years.

CHRISTOPHER HOGAN
Washington, D.C.

To the editors:

This is the first time I have been moved to write since leaving your masthead nearly five years ago.

Matthew Miller's piece on Medicare and the Democrats is a new low, even for the '90s TNR. What's going on in health care, in case Miller hasn't been reading of the HMO and managed care scandals, is the entrepreneurial takeover of health insurance and a race to the bottom to see who can provide the most stripped-down care.

The good model of pre-paid group health is being driven out by real sharks, often taking advantage of the fact that consumers have no effective freedom to shop around, due to employer lock-in or pre-existing conditions. There is fat in the health system, but the entrepreneurial brand of reform gouges bone—while reaping profits as high as forty cents on the health dollar.

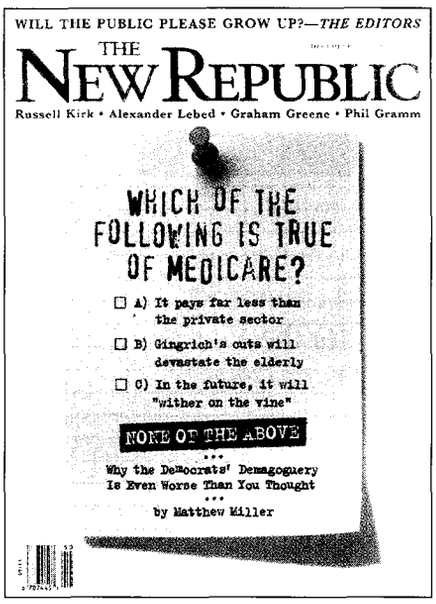
Medicare remains one of the few oases of consumer choice and relative clinical freedom from rapacious managed care reviewers. In his eagerness to bash the Dems, Miller flips the real story 180 degrees and paints the managed care industry as a paragon of efficiency and Medicare as wasteful government spending. Reported accurately, the contrast makes a good case for universalizing Medicare.

How fitting and sad that Miller, who seems to define the good society mainly in terms of deficit reduction, is now your economics editor. I thought you couldn't sink lower than Betsy McCaughey's mendacious piece on the Clinton plan, but this does it.

ROBERT KUTTNER
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Matthew Miller replies:

It seems Robert Kuttner is responding not to my article, but to one that it stirred up in his imagination. I didn't argue that Medicare is "wasteful government spending," but that slowing Medicare's projected growth rate from 10 percent to 7 percent was a reasonable goal. Rather than hailing all aspects of managed care, I explained how it was lowering costs in the private sector in ways that are surprising and that the current debate overlooks. As to instances of HMO profiteering, I devoted much of the piece to exposing how the GOP's plans for Medicare HMOs are about to hand avoidable windfalls to many providers. Finally, I argued that as we seek the kind of savings the GOP proposes, universal health care becomes


WILL THE PUBLIC PLEASE GROW UP?—THE EDITORS
THE NEW REPUBLIC
Russell Kirk • Alexander Lebed • Graham Greene • Phil Gramm
WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING IS TRUE OF MEDICARE?
☐ A) It pays far less than the private sector
☐ B) Gingrich's cuts will devastate the elderly
☐ C) In the future, it will "wither on the vine"
NONE OF THE ABOVE
Why the Democrats' Demagoguery Is Even Worse Than You Thought
by Matthew Miller

more important than ever.

My guess is that Mr. Kuttner and I share more ideas on "the good society" than his caricature of my arguments suggests. In macroeconomics, at least, mine begin by taking seriously—not simply rhetorically—President Clinton's 1992 campaign goals of raising public and private investment dramatically to improve wage growth and living standards for the middle class.

Like many Democrats today, Kuttner either has a blind spot when it comes to the budget deficit's impact on savings and investment, or would like to pretend we can put off hard choices on our unsustainable entitlements even while the baby boom's retirement draws near. I disagree.

Youth culture

To the editors:

Your editorial ("Please Grow Up," December 11, 1995) complaining about the immaturity and vacillation of Americans, who in 1994 blamed Democrats for huge deficits and now blame Republicans for ending them, misses the obvious point.

Those who actually voted in 1994 were a minority of voters and an unrepresentative minority at that. Democrats lost because their supporters stayed home. Polling samples are more representative of the population in general, and these Americans consistently oppose Republican efforts to cut Medicare and to end Medicaid entitlements.

The fact is that Republicans are now reaping the harvest of their hidden agenda. I can't recall any Republican promising to cut Medicare or to end Medicaid in his or her '94 campaign. Republicans forgot Lincoln's adage about fooling the people.

TIM MCFEELEY
Washington, D.C.

To the editors:

Thank you for showing us spoiled children your courage in telling us those things we don't want to hear. Perhaps our immature, rebellious tendencies would be better disciplined if your scolding were more evenhanded. You see, the parental favorites—the teacher's pets—don't seem to have the same law laid down on them. While the deficit has been growing, the privileged few wealthy investors have pretty continuously enjoyed record profits. Their portion of the whole pie keeps growing, and they still haven't learned to share. The rest of us are sternly told to live with stagnant wages and fewer benefits while the stock market reaches record highs, and it never seems enough.

The only debate we hear about this is how much greater a tax break they should be given. We know you're right, Mom and Dad: we can't have our cake and eat it, too. But until we see the favorites subjected to such stern wisdom, count me among the delinquents.

CARL FITZPATRICK
Evanston, Illinois

Separated at death

To the editors:

Based upon Nicolae Ceauşescu's deeds during his lifetime, it is highly probable that he is now in the place called Ghena, which is the name given to hell in Hebrew. It's interesting to note the closeness of the name of the cemetery mentioned in Charles Lane's "The Undead" (December 11, 1995), Ghencea, to the name Ghena. Is this a coincidence?

JERROLD P. KATZ
Cambridge, Massachusetts

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Where We Stand

By Albert Shanker, President
American Federation of Teachers

Looking Back

Last Wednesday, this column celebrated its 25th anniversary. Where We Stand first appeared in the *New York Times* on December 13, 1970, and, except for one summer break, it has come out every week since then—a total of nearly 1,300 columns. Why did I start Where We Stand? I answered this question in a column I wrote in 1990.

Before teachers were unionized and gained the right to bargain collectively, they were poorly paid and badly treated. But they usually got plenty of sympathy from the press. All that changed with unionization. Teachers who could shut down the schools were no longer powerless, so they—and their unions—got plenty of criticism from the press.

Like many other labor leaders, I didn't pay much attention to the harsh words. Union members were the ones who elected me, and as long as what I said and did satisfied my constituency, I figured that's what counted.

In 1967 I led New York City teachers in a 14-day strike, and in 1968 we engaged in the longest teacher strike in U.S. history. We had substantial public support, but it seemed to me that people were more and more seeing the teachers' union primarily as a group that used brute force to get what it wanted. Sure, many teachers joined to improve their salaries and working conditions. But they also joined to change a system that wasn't working for kids or teachers, a system that thousands of idealistic teachers left each year because they were convinced it was hopeless.

During these strikes, I became one of the best-known figures in New York City, but people saw me only as a militant union leader—urging teachers to strike, refusing to settle, going to jail. I became convinced that I had been wrong in believing that the public's opinion of me didn't matter. Public schools depend on public support. And the public was not likely to support the schools for long if they thought teachers were led by a powerful madman. The joke in the movie "Sleeper" where the Woody Allen character hears the world was destroyed when "a man by the name of Albert Shanker got hold of a nuclear warhead" was a fair reflection of this view.

I decided to devote some time and energy to letting the public know that the union's president was someone who read books and had ideals and ideas about how to fix the schools. I approached some magazines with ideas for articles but was rebuffed with comments like "Who's going to write your stuff?" as if a union leader would be unable to write for himself.

"Why don't you become a columnist for the *New York Times*?"

I asked for advice from Arnold Beichman, who is now a distinguished writer and fellow at the Hoover Institution. Beichman agreed with my analysis, and after suggesting things I had already tried, he said, "Why don't you become a columnist for the *New York Times*?" I objected that the *Times* would rather give me a punch in the nose than editorial space. Beichman's answer was, "Buy it. Buy space for a weekly column in the same spot every week. You'll be able to respond to *Times* editorials and give readers a different slant on things. You'll be able to criticize shoddy coverage of education issues there and in other papers. You can review books on education; before long, authors will be sending you manuscripts. Last but not least, you can use the column to endorse good candidates for political office. If you build a following, those endorsements will be worth a lot.

"Just one more thing," Beichman said. "Don't bother if the column is going to sound like organization boilerplate. It will be effective only if you are free to explore and advance ideas, even if they are not union policy and are controversial."

I think the column has done what Beichman predicted. It has readers all over the world, and thousands of people have written to express their appreciation—or tell me I should shut up. It has also provided a discipline for me—it requires that I summarize complex ideas accurately and deal with them in a limited space. I'm sure that my own ideas about education and politics are clearer and more coherent because I have to figure out how to present them to the general public in 800-word essays.

Why do I continue writing the column? The weekly deadlines do not get any easier, and advertising costs continue to climb. The short answer is because of the response I get from readers. Whenever I consider stopping, I get a well-reasoned critique of a recent column or an excellent manuscript or I meet somebody in an airport halfway across the world who says he looks forward to reading the column even though he gets it two weeks late—and I'm ready to go again.

Mr. Shanker's comments appear in this ad under the auspices of the American Federation of Teachers. Reader correspondence is invited. Address your letters to Mr. Shanker at the AFT, 555 New Jersey Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001. © 1996 by Albert Shanker.

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JANUARY 8 & 15, 1996

SMOKE AND FIRE

As the New York police sift through the ashes of Freddy's Fashion Mart and unearth the blame for that ghastly night, they'd be wise to look at clues from the following morning. Bright and early, the same protesters who had watched Freddy's burn were out on the block again. They had gathered not to mourn the eight who were shot and burned to death in the blaze the night before, but to keep alive "the cause": "Now we will drive Bargain World out of business," bragged their yellow pamphlets. Bargain World, run by Arthur Rosen in Harlem since 1938, "must go," they chanted. At a later rally, the crowd cheered as speaker after speaker declared the man who had burned Freddy's and shot himself, Roland James Smith, a martyred hero.

By now, it has sunk in that Smith was not an isolated figure, that the wild words shouted on the block for weeks before had incited his wild deed. But what still stings is the absence of reflection on those words, or of remorse. The Reverend Al Sharpton waited only one day before continuing the deception. First, Sharpton denied he had organized the rallies. Then a tape surfaced of him whipping up the crowd, daring them not to "stand by and allow ... some white interloper [to] expand his business on 125th Street." When he heard about the tape, Sharpton said he welcomed a grand jury, so they could subpoena the mayor and find out why "he and the Police Department didn't do anything ... about these alleged threats of violence." As a finale, he rounded up a phalanx of clean-cut ministers in suits and ties to defend him: "We think it's not alone an assault on the Reverend Al Sharpton," they read from a prepared statement. "It is an assault on all black people." This man has clearly not learned that his game can be deadly.

But blame does not lie with the Reverend of 125th Street alone. Listen to the shouts of the protesters, and you will hear familiar echoes: "That cracker's insane" should take you back to 1993, the night of Nation of Islam official Khallid Muhammad's thuggish Kean College speech. "Bloodsucking Jews"—vintage Louis Farrakhan, also a stock phrase in William Tatum's weekly *Amsterdam News*, on black businessman Percy Sutton's radio show on his station WLIB, in Leonard Jeffries's classroom. All of which prompted the timeless threat: "I'll be back to burn the Jew store down. Burn, burn, burn."

Smith's life was rich with voices of support (for an early insight into this murderous brand of black racism, see Jim Sleeper's "Psycho Killer," TNR, 1/10&17/1994). First were the militant black nationalists, his friends from Florida told *The New York Times*, who taught him to die like a warrior, fighting the system. Later came Marcus Garvey, who taught him the vision of a black autarky that drove the protesters. But all this got boiled down to hatred for whites and Jews, personal resentments in Smith's cocooned world: "The system" mutated into a small-time tailor on 125th Street. And the failure of black self-sufficiency—always a dead-end vision—became Giuliani's decision to shut down the 125th Street vendors. (Although if Garvey's vision thrives anywhere, it's in Harlem, where, contrary to Smith's delusions, black businesses are thriving, with 158 of the 322 stores on 125th Street owned by African Americans, according to the 125th Street Business Improvement District.)

Of course, black nationalism has no monopoly on deadly paranoia. From Belgrade to the American heartland, the patterns of conspiratorial delusion are painfully familiar. The protesters outside Bargain World bear a discomforting, if distant, resemblance to those Serbs who, having inflicted yet another horror, pathologically ascribed it to the other side; or those Hebron settlers, who, the day after Rabin's assassination, continued to hand out pictures of Rabin labeled "traitor." And Smith's relentless obsession with the system's injustice would make Timothy McVeigh proud.

But if any proof is needed that the world is not as they see it, it's in the details. In the Harlem case, there was some talk about a lease stolen from a black man by a white store owner. But it turns out that the property was owned by the United House of Prayer for All People, a black Pentecostal church. And there was also talk about "Kill the Jew bastards." But it turns out the poor bastards who died were black and Puerto Rican and Guyanese, 19 and 22 and 23 years old, some working two jobs, taking care of children. It is not excessively gloomy this Christmas to say that the darknesses of 1995—from Srebrenica to Oklahoma City—found a suitably choking finale on 125th Street. There are some things this year we will be only too glad to leave behind. •

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NOTEBOOK

SIC TRANSIT: A 13-year-old boy in a Santa Claus costume robbed a bank in Grand Rapids, Michigan.... Federal Reserve Board member Lawrence Lindsey's application for a Toys-R-Us credit card was rejected because a computer model deemed him a bad risk.... A pair of silk underwear worn by Greta Garbo circa 1943 was pulled by Christie's auction house when bidding stopped well short of a $10,000 minimum.... Several passengers became obnoxiously drunk on a transatlantic flight only to find themselves subdued and restrained by members of the U.S. Olympic wrestling team, who were seated nearby.... NBC bought exclusive rights to the once ubiquitous *It's a Wonderful Life*, ensuring the network's single airing would be the only one of the season. Bah, humbug!

MAYBE I'M NOT A REAL SPACE CADET, AFTER ALL.
SURE I WAS JEALOUS, BUT SAM NEEDS BOTH OF US FOR A BUDGET DEAL.
NEWT LIGHTYEAR
BILLY
HUMAN STORY
"A little slow!"
-Viewer's Poll
CAREFUL. HIS ARM COMES OFF.
TOLES
UNIVERSAL PRESS SYND.
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AFFIRMATIVE REACTION: The philosophical bankruptcy and moral incoherence of the Clinton administration's civil rights policy were on display December 7, when Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights Deval Patrick testified in opposition to a House bill that would outlaw racial preferences. Patrick informed the House subcommittee on the Constitution that the Clinton administration is opposed to quotas—but will fight to the death for "numerical goals and timetables." According to Patrick, quotas are already illegal: "Executive Order 11246 outlaws quotas. The 1991 Civil Rights Act outlaws quotas.... The Constitution of the United States, as interpreted by the Supreme Court, outlaws quotas. The President, as a matter of public policy, has opposed quotas." And rightly so, according to Patrick: "Nearly everyone opposes quotas, including the president. 'Quotas' are the enemy of merit." Though quotas are bad, "affirmative consideration"—"where race, gender, or ethnicity may be one factor considered among others in evaluating among qualified candidates"—must be preserved. So must "goals and timetables" to ensure "accountability." Haven't universities and firms, afraid of Justice Department suits, protected themselves by using "goals and timetables" as de facto quotas? Patrick does not address this objection; instead, he changes the subject: "The Contract With America ... that's a goal and timetable. Balancing the budget in seven years—that's a goal and timetable." Don't universities regularly admit blacks and Hispanics with scores far below those of whites and Asians who are turned away? "We accept that some programs describing themselves as 'affirmative action' may have been too rigid or heavy-handed, or may even have compromised quality. But these are rare." No, they are routine. Patrick turns from sophistry to demagogy, accusing the bill's sponsors of racism: the "real message" of the bill is that its sponsors "are ready to give up our objective of integration." In the weird world of the Clinton Justice Department, it is not racist to oppose quotas, but anyone who opposes "goals and timetables" is a segregationist. Not that the Clinton administration even believes that its anti-quota, pro-goals and timetables policy will bring about integration—"affirmative action has a symbolic significance all out of proportion to its practical impact." The lowest point in his testimony came when Patrick treated the committee to a parade of horrors that have nothing to do with quotas or goals or timetables: "A young black man was forced in a store to take the shirt he had bought there the day before off his back and leave the store in his undershirt until he could return with a receipt." We had hoped the administration would use its review of affirmative action to reject this kind of avoidance and double-talk and clearly commit to the once and future liberal idea of race-neutral law. It has not.

WITHOUT RESERVATIONS: We are generally skeptical of the states-rights mania that has seized the Republican Congress, but if ever there was a Washington agency which suffers from being too distant from the people it serves, it is the Bureau of Indian Affairs,

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which a Senate committee this week voted to devolve to states and localities. Washington's link to the nation's tribes is so laughably bureaucratic that over the years more than 1,000 studies have urged that it be revamped. For instance, the BIA's 16,000-page internal guidelines manual is so extensive that only one complete copy is known to exist. Many of the codes date back to the 1800s, and not only have Native American leaders not been allowed input into the designing of many of the rules, many have never even seen the full text. The committee unanimously voted to allow tribes to recraft the local, regional and federal agency offices in accordance with their needs. Tribes will be able to pick which social services they would like to receive in the form of block grants and those which they want the feds to continue to provide. How about the rest of us?

CONSUMERS HAVE DRAMATICALLY CUT BACK THEIR BORROWING WHICH COULD SLOW THE ECONOMY, BUT WHICH MIGHT BE A HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT AFTER THEIR HEAVY EARLIER BORROWING WHICH BOOSTED THE ECONOMY BUT ADDED TO CONCERNS OF LOW SAVINGS AND OVERSTIMULATION, BUT COULD RESULT IN SLUGGISH SALES LEADING INTO THE ALL-IMPORTANT CHRISTMAS SALES PERIOD...
IT USED TO BE A LOT EASIER TO KNOW IF THEY'VE BEEN BAD OR GOOD.
...AS WE CONTINUE OUR LOOK AT THE REAL MEANING OF CHRISTMAS SALES INDICATORS
TOLES
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MOMMY, WHO IS RICHARD LUGAR?: In desperation, Dick Lugar has gone nuclear. With the primary season imminent and his poll numbers in the basement, Lugar has launched a last-ditch ad campaign to salvage his run for the GOP nomination. The four-part storyline depicts a band of terrorists who have gotten hold of nuclear materials and are threatening to blow up an American city. Like a bad NBC miniseries, the ads show armed gunmen who look like campaign staffers and a teddy-clutching little girl who asks, "Mommy, won't the bomb wake everybody up?," which is exactly what Lugar is hoping to do. Instead, he has managed to undermine the one element that sets him apart from his competitors: seriousness.

CHINA WATCH: The conviction of Wei Jingsheng on charges of sedition serves as a further indictment of the Clinton administration's feckless policy toward China. As a candidate in 1992, Clinton chastised George Bush for his evasion of moral and human rights considerations in foreign policy negotiations. As president, though, Clinton has sheepishly backed away from a strong advocacy of human rights, insisting, as Bush did, that economic liberalization would act as a catalyst toward political liberalization. Yet Jingsheng's imprisonment proves the Chinese rightly believe they can maintain cordial relations with the West without any repercussions. Perhaps administration officials could learn a lesson or two from Chinese trade officials. As *The Wall Street Journal* recently reported, the Chinese have been deftly pressuring U.S. and European companies to transfer technology to China in exchange for the right to do business in the country. Eager to get a piece of the burgeoning market, many Western companies have caved. If you can't beat them, join them, we guess. But for Chinese dissidents, it's still: if you can't beat them, jail them.

WE'RE STILL REREADING *THE BRIDGES OF MADISON COUNTY*: Our friends at *The Standard*, the conservative weekly, have come up with another way for people to feel bad. Each week they publish a rather humiliatingly erudite list of classics that relate tangentially to a current topic. Anyone interested in Colin Powell, for instance, is encouraged to dive into Caesar's *The Gallic Wars*. Having trouble with the budget crisis? Perhaps you overlooked Ortega y Gasset this fall. But don't feel too guilty about the gaps in your erudition. The editors at *The Standard*, it seems, are suffering from the same problem. A recent issue contains a rather lengthy correction that itself contained more errors. The authors inexplicably mistook *The Charterhouse of Parma* for *War and Peace*. *Incroyable.* This week, they mistook Waugh's *Black Mischief* for *Scoop*. *Incroyable.* Now if only they could tell the difference between a budget that cuts spending sensibly and one loaded with tax cuts for the rich.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS: This is a double Christmas issue, and TNR will be shut down next week. The editors will spend their time off calculating their holiday bonuses—on CBO figures (in consultation with OMB, of course). •

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WHITE HOUSE WATCH

MIGHTY QUINN

By Matthew Cooper

On August 7, Bill Clinton was, as is his habit, channel surfing late at night in the residence of the White House. When he got to C-SPAN and its rebroadcast of the Senate Whitewater Committee's hearings, he quit clicking, say insiders. That day, several White House officials had testified, including Jack Quinn, the chief of staff to Vice President Al Gore. Clinton, sources say, was transfixed and delighted by Quinn's forcefulness.

Quinn had argued that Bernard Nussbaum, far from being overzealous in his handling of the investigation following the suicide of Vincent Foster, was at first too accommodating. Since Nussbaum had come to be seen as an obstructionist, Quinn's arguments were, to say the least, unusual. Yet Quinn held his ground under the committee's questioning. He maintained that the White House was under no obligation to let the Justice Department participate in a search of Foster's office. Instead, Quinn insisted, the White House counsel had a solemn duty to search the office first, removing sensitive documents not germane to the Foster investigation and, only then, to allow in the investigators. This was music to Clinton. The next day, the president congratulated Quinn. Little wonder that some in the White House believe that Quinn's testimony got him his recent appointment as White House counsel.

Quinn's hard line is now the order of the day. As the White House's top lawyer it is Quinn's responsibility to coordinate the administration's response to the congressional Whitewater hearings and the independent investigation being conducted by Kenneth Starr. The 45-year-old Quinn is torn between obligations. On the one hand, he must deal with the politics of the scandal, in particular the Washington dictum to put everything on the table. On the other hand, he must be a lawyer. And a lawyer, by nature, doesn't show his hand. This Beltway balance eluded Nussbaum and it may elude Quinn, too. It's telling that it was Quinn who pushed Nussbaum to take a harder line with the Justice Department. While much of the Senate committee's attention has been focused on Susan Thomases and Maggie Williams, allies of Mrs. Clinton, and whether they somehow got to Nussbaum, it now seems clear that Quinn, who is less well known, had much to do with Nussbaum's reneging on his deal with investigators to give them full access to Foster's office. A few days after Foster's suicide, Quinn appealed to Nussbaum not to let the investigators have their way. "I have always believed that Bernie had one position when he met with me," Quinn told me, "and one when he walked out."

Now that Quinn is top dog, his harder-than-Nussbaum line seems to be working, just barely. Quinn's refusal to fork over certain documents—mostly from meetings involving the president's private attorneys—has brought him heat from Senate Whitewater Chair Alfonse D'Amato and *The New York Times* editorial page. And a court battle may ensue. But that's tempered by the fact that the White House press corps is more focused on Bosnia and the budget. The public doesn't care. So Quinn may be able to hang tough. He's even willing to poke gentle fun at D'Amato, saying that a D'Amato rejection of a Clinton proposal to release the notes with conditions "could be summarized in a couple of words—and 'Happy Birthday' doesn't come to mind."

Quinn's hard line is the product of years as a consummate K Street lawyer where he helped clients like Philip Morris get their way. A Georgetown graduate and Arnold & Porter partner, he worked as a counsel to Gary Hart's 1984 presidential campaign and would have helped Hart in 1988 except for a little problem named Donna Rice. Instead, Quinn wound up on Al Gore's '88 campaign, where he was better known for tactics than vision. In early 1992, Quinn hooked up with Bob Kerrey but was there to help Gore prep for his vice presidential debate. And in the Clinton White House, Quinn rose quickly under Gore's auspices, becoming Gore's chief of staff in 1993. Quinn's elbows were sharp, but Gore trusted him. So did Clinton. Quinn, for instance, unlike Leon Panetta or Harold Ickes, was among the tiny handful of White House aides to meet with Dick Morris when Clinton reached out to the ambidextrous consultant after the disastrous 1994 elections. And last spring, when Deputy White House Chief of Staff Erskine Bowles announced that he wanted to leave the White House—which he will do just before Christmas—Quinn was the top pick to fill Bowles's pivotal job. If there's a Gore administration, Quinn may be its chief of staff.

But that's another day. In the coming months, Quinn faces several problems. First, there's a knowledge gap. No one at the White House really knows what Whitewater evidence remains to be unearthed. Just before Christmas, for example, there was the tantalizing revelation, in notes made by Thomases, that Mrs. Clinton may have done far more on behalf of Madison Guaranty than she had previously acknowledged. You'll recall that it was the accusation from Jerry Brown during the 1992 presidential campaign that she had improperly represented Madison before the state of Arkansas that led Mrs. Clinton to blurt out her famous "I suppose I could have stayed home and baked cookies and had teas" line. Brown, though, may have been right. More revelations

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may be on the way. Some White House aides fear the publication, later this winter, of former *Wall Street Journal* reporter James Stewart's Whitewater book.

Second, Quinn has to face a press corps that is poised to push Whitewater. One sign of the press's souring mood came with the release of the Resolution Trust Corporation's recent report, which found the Clintons guilty of no wrongdoing. This was the report by conservative Republican lawyer Jay Stephens, the man whose appointment so angered George Stephanopoulos that he got on the phone to Treasury Department aide Josh Steiner to "blow off steam." Incredibly, Stephens's report went unmentioned in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* on the day of its being publicized. The RTC's preliminary report received more attention last summer, but not much considering how Stephanopoulos's ire over Stephens's appointment put the Whitewater story in overdrive. (See "Big Zit," September 4, 1995.) And anything that reeks of stonewalling, no matter how legally sound, has the potential to incite the capital. Bob Dole now likens Clinton to Nixon. That's ridiculous. Jack Quinn is no John Ehrlichman. But a lot of people, he'll find, will be out to paint him that way. •

Culinary assimilation on 2nd Avenue.

NEW DELI

By Peter Beinart

A couple of years ago, Murray Riese, high-flying owner of over 100 restaurants and food courts throughout New York, sought some advice from Abe Lebewohl, owner of the legendary 2nd Avenue Deli. Riese planned to open a deli chain and wanted a standard operating manual. To Lebewohl, a Ukrainian-born Jew whose Yiddish accent weighs heavily on his adopted tongue, the idea was preposterous. "If you buy fifteen briskets, each one will be different.... The man who cuts it, he can't be a robot. When it's a little softer he cuts it thicker, when it's a little harder he cuts it a little thinner." Lebewohl demonstrates by furiously sawing against the table with his hand. "When a person cuts a piece of meat, it's got to be in him. It's like you have to understand. It's instinctive. How the heck do you put this in a manual?"

People like Murray Riese probably represent the future of delis, and it's a future of culinary assimilation. When Lebewohl founded the 2nd Avenue in 1954, hordes of kosher delis and dairy restaurants vied for the spill-off from the historic Yiddish theater on the corner of 12th Street. Old-timers remember the great Romanian eatery Moscowitz and Lupowitz; not far away stood Ratner's, which then had a branch on 2nd and Fifth as well as its flagship on east Delancey. Back then, there were hundreds of mom-and-pop kosher delis throughout Manhattan. Today you can count them on one hand.

Sure, the non-kosher delis uptown—Carnegie, Stage, Starr's, Roxy's, Wolf's—get the press, but purists insist that they've gone astray. None are in the hands of the men who founded them, and most of the new owners are, like Murray Riese, businessmen from outside the deli world. They cater largely to tourists (Stage owner Paul Zolenge claims that 30 percent of his customers are Japanese), competing for the out-of-town buck with soulless midtown creations like the Hard Rock Cafe and Planet Hollywood. And they've changed the menus: the Stage now offers turkey burgers, chicken breasts and salads. Such compromises are not for Abe. When health-conscious customers ask for less fat on their pastrami, the expansive Abe, who still eats a salami for breakfast every morning, will dutifully place lean pieces on top but discreetly stuff fattier ones underneath to give the sandwich flavor. "Without fat a pastrami sandwich is a worthless commodity," he told *The New York Times* five years ago. "Extra lean annoys me."

But the 2nd Avenue is fighting its own battle for its soul as a deli—and critics argue that Abe has committed a transgression greater than the introduction of turkey burgers. When Abe founded his deli on 2nd Avenue and 10th Street, he chose a neighborhood with a reputation not only for Jewish entertainment and Jewish food, but for Jewish labor unionism. The Jewish Labor Committee was founded two blocks down on 8th Street. Leon Trotsky took tea just around the corner, and a few blocks east on Avenue A, a Jewish immigrant named Samuel Gompers led a cigar makers' strike that led to the birth of the American Federation of Labor.

In such an environment, Abe's deli was, of course, unionized. In fact, having been a counterman himself, Abe was a union member. When the Association of Delis struck a deal with the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union, Abe always agreed. "I signed, I never checked, I never hired a lawyer." At a small deli in a working-class Jewish community, the interests of the owner did not diverge sharply from those of his handful of waiters, countermen and cooks. "We were amicable," Abe recalls. "'Cause you're not talking about giants. You're talking about a guy that, now he owns a deli, tomorrow he's working there."

But over time the 2nd Avenue changed. The neighborhood declined, and became less Jewish, and the deli began catering to growing numbers of outsiders from places like New Jersey and the Upper West Side. With the changing neighborhood, the staff also changed. Puerto Ricans and Dominicans replaced Jews behind the counter, and Irish and South Asians replaced them as waiters.

And as the cultural and economic distance between Abe, his customers and his employees grew, the deli lost some of its intimacy. Waiter Norman Lerman recounts a recent incident: "A [waiter] sits down one day and he's eating a knish, and [the manager] says, 'If you're

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caught again you're going to get to get suspended.' For eating a knish! Which we always did." For Paul Berman, a New York writer who knows the deli well, the telltale sign of the 2nd Avenue's bourgeoisification was the stockticker that Abe put up to make Wall Street types feel at home. But the shift did not lead to open conflict until late 1994, when it came time to renegotiate the deli's contract with Local 100, the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union.

At roughly the time contract negotiations began, Abe's brother Jack, a lawyer with no experience behind a counter, came aboard as an adviser. On Jack's advice, Abe decided he could no longer accept a contract that made union membership mandatory for 2nd Avenue employees. And while other issues, such as health benefits, have emerged during negotiations, the closed shop remains the crux of the conflict. The union sees the attack on mandatory participation as a betrayal of the 2nd Avenue's forty-year tradition; Abe and Jack claim they're just trying to stay competitive in a changing neighborhood. After years of decline, 2nd Avenue has experienced a recent surge of gentrification. The result is a bevy of new ethnic restaurants—Japanese, Mexican, Tibetan, Bangladeshi—few of which are unionized.

After months of failed negotiations, the employees' contract ran out in November 1994, and while the staff voted to remain working, last spring they began picketing the restaurant on days off. On the Saturday night I was there, a half-dozen bundled-up waiters and cooks stood outside, near the walkway where engraved plaques pay homage to the great figures of the Yiddish stage, chanting slogans into the cold air and imploring patrons to bypass the deli. "It's a *shanda*," yelled union organizer Nelson Nunez, showing off the Yiddish he has learned since Local 100's food wars turned kosher. But the union's attempt to resurrect the spirit of Jewish labor protest has failed. Two local groups, the Jewish Labor Committee and Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, have backed the boycott, but it hasn't won the support of local rabbis nor generated much attention.

One reason the boycott hasn't put neighborhood pressure on the Lebewohls is that the 2nd Avenue no longer relies as much on the neighborhood for its existence. While Nunez says that the boycott has "got a lot of support from the local people," he admits that "a lot of out-of-town folks, they're not so supportive. They say, 'I'm only here for the day, so what's the difference?'." Indeed, when Nunez and a few others aim their slogan, "FORGET YOUR BELLY, PLEASE BOYCOTT THE DELI," at a tall man about to cross the deli's threshold, he notes in self-defense that he's from Minnesota.

Abe and Jack seem to be weathering the boycott well. The 2nd Avenue is one of the few authentic delis left in New York, and its customers feel a strong bond with it, perhaps even more so now that many live in neighborhoods with few traditional Jewish institutions of any kind. So if Nelson Nunez is appealing to nostalgia with his Yiddish chants, he's also battling against it. And in the neighborhood that gave the Jews of New York both corned beef and labor radicalism, corned beef is winning. •

Against the peer pressure.

A NORMAL LESBIAN

By Norah Vincent

"Crate and Barrel," I said, "That sounds like a lesbian store, doesn't it?" "Sounds like what a lesbian would wear," said Susan. Susan and I are best friends, and both lesbians. We joke this way often. We are incessant watchers, curious about other lesbians and whether we can literally tease them out of the crowd. There are always crude symbols to go by, of course: rainbow flags, pink triangles, pink ribbons. And, naturally, the rote slogans of a cause—"THE LESBIAN AVENGERS. WE RECRUIT." Hence the jokes, a kind of bitter relief from orthodoxy.

But, for me, there is an urgent question under the jokes, a question the so-called "lesbian community" does not ask: Who am I?

If the straight world (and sometimes the gay male world) has defined lesbians falsely, even maliciously, then lesbians have, to some degree, acquiesced, by forgetting the I and playing into stereotypes. Lesbians have labels for everyone, it seems: "bull dyke," "granola dyke," "baby dyke," "power dyke," "butch," "soft butch," "femme," "lipstick lesbian." It goes on and on, and these are the same labels that make it easy for straight people, and gay men, to misrepresent lesbians. If we want the truth about lesbians, labels will not lead us to it, or at least not to an answer that will make any human difference.

If the question is—What does it mean to be a lesbian?—then the answer is semantic, and the same for everyone: a primary, sexual and emotional attraction to women. Reductive as it sounds, this is the only answer that will give lesbians the equality they demand. Only the simplicity of what the word "lesbian" means can make being a lesbian a neutral fact of life to which all other traits, lifestyles, professions, proclivities are incidental and beside the point. Only this literal definition will make the word "lesbian" a nonissue in public life because it threads lesbianism so completely through the fabric of "the norm" that it cannot be separated from it.

The straight world has taken lesbians, a numeric minority, and made them, by false argument, a moral, social and political minority; and in retreating to the entrenched haven of groupthink, the "lesbian community" has colluded in this sophistry. But, if I am an individual, if "lesbian" is reduced to one among many words that describe me, it ceases to so effectively define and marginalize me.

No doubt, some lesbians will label this a "back to the closet argument," i.e., if you want straight rights,

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then act straight. But heterocloning is not my answer to the problems lesbians face; individualism is. To straights, lesbianism may never be as innocuous as left-handedness, but ghettoization merely aggravates prejudice.

Defining oneself beyond lesbianism, however, is anathema to the group. Behaviors not sanctioned by lesbian codes of conduct are suspect in the "lesbian community," because they smack of conformity to straight life and so-called "patriarchal" notions of womanhood. Lesbianism, for many, has become an isolationist lifestyle, complete with its own vocabulary, food, clothing, politics, medicine and psychology. Dissent is no laughing matter.

About a year ago, a woman bought me a beer in a lesbian bar and taught me quickly this cool lesson of conformity. After setting the beer in front of me, she seemed suddenly distraught. She asked me if my jacket was made of leather. I said it wasn't. She then looked down at my shoes and my belt and asked if *they* were made of leather. I admitted they were, which prompted her to take back my beer: she couldn't buy a drink for anybody wearing animal hide, she explained, and pinned to my shirt a button bearing a save the animals slogan. Then she turned and offered the beer to the woman next to me. (The satisfying coda to the story is that *this* woman returned the beer, saying that she couldn't accept it in good conscience, since her parents were furriers.)

I had failed the lesbian test because in the "lesbian community" political loyalty to a particular set of causes is a prerequisite for inclusion. The veterans of everything from butch/femme in the 1950s to radical feminism in the 1970s are its esteemed matriarchs—older, seasoned women, disrespectful of the young and uninitiated. While in the gay male culture youth and beauty are absurdly apotheosized, in the "lesbian community" they are often resented and denigrated. How many times have these older women said to me: "Yeah, well God knows where you were in the '70s," or casually dropped a degrading reference to youth and its assumed concomitants, social and political ignorance?

Recently, I attended a fund-raising event for a lesbian foundation, featuring a staged reading of a new lesbian screenplay. The story, touted as a lesbian *Big Chill*, took place at a house in the Berkshires where a group of old friends gathered to celebrate one couple's new baby. The script was filled with lesbian clichés. Half the women had been paired off as lovers at one time or another and were still working through old resentments. Most were political refugees of the 1970s. Several were either alcoholics or proselytizing twelve-steppers. In one scene they sat around the porch with a guitar, warbling Holly Near tunes and recounting their coming-out stories.

The comic centerpiece was a 23-year-old corporate-bimbo type with a glen plaid suit, high heels and a page-boy haircut. The much younger lover of one of the old friends, she was many other things she wasn't supposed to be: well-groomed, attractive and straight-looking. She was also many of the things the writer believed must naturally follow from these qualities: vapid, spoiled, uninformed and complacent.

Many a poorly made lesbian film has embarrassed me of late, but this script was conspicuous because it embodied so much of the "lesbian community's" worst conformism. The writer's message was clear: don't be young, don't accept beauty, don't trespass, don't be yourself; instead, be disgruntled and carping, self-deprecating in your dress and demeanor, avoid anything that passes for accomplishment or assimilation in the mainstream, be a real lesbian and sing along.

As a young lesbian, my answer is this: be original, and write something that is a profound, intelligent depiction of the human spirit in a lesbian milieu, or if you prefer comedy, at least produce something that is clever enough not to become a parody of itself. If lesbians truly want equal rights and equal treatment, they should step into the real world, make a case for their humanity first and even learn to take a joke.

NORAH VINCENT is an assistant editor at The Free Press.

AFTER YOU'VE GONE

RESTON PEACE

By Jacob Heilbrunn

By common consent James "Scotty" Reston, who died December 6 at age 86, was the dominant newsman of his generation. A fixture at *The New York Times* for over five decades, Reston came to define the paper as much as it defined him. So when the *Times* hailed him in his obituary as a "nonpareil among American journalists," it was hailing itself as much as Reston. Even *The Washington Post* paid homage to the passing of the journalist giant.

But what none of the encomiums pointed out was that, in fact, Reston was a self-promoter whose wildly inflated reputation was based on his willingness to serve as a water carrier for everyone in power from Dean Acheson to Henry Kissinger. Far from being a pioneering newsman, Reston was essentially a glorified servant of the American establishment who identified the interests of the *Times* with the interests of Washington.

Like his Georgetown neighbor John McCloy, Reston was an outsider who worked his way into the ranks of the establishment. He was born November 3, 1909, in Clydebank, Scotland, into a poor family and spent the rest of his life transcending his humble origins. In 1920, the family emigrated to Dayton, Ohio, where Scotty worked as a caddy for the local gentry. After scraping his way through the University of Illinois, he became a

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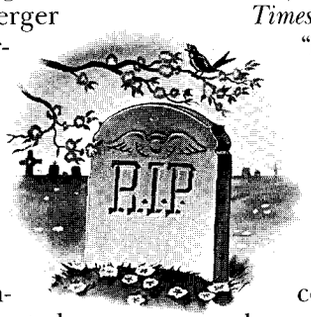
sportswriter in the Midwest, New York and London. The genre suited him: he essentially saw politics as sports, and himself cheering on the home team, giving the coach a few tips on the side.

In 1939, after several years of importuning the *Times* for a job, Reston got his first break: hired the day World War II broke out, he worked in London for a year before being transferred to Washington, where, in 1942, he wrote his first book, *Prelude to Victory*. In it, Reston stroked his old bosses at the *Times* with references to the "great responsible newspaper of the world" and preached the bipartisanship that he would later apotheosize: "Somehow we have got into the habit of thinking everyone a whole-hogger: everything is either right or wrong, black or white, everybody is either a New Dealer or an Old Dealer, a Roosevelt follower or a Roosevelt hater, isolationist or Utopian, tory or red ... in almost all cases the truth of the matter lies not at the extremes at all but somewhere in the middle."

Reston himself used the war to shoot for the whole hog. Detailed to the American Embassy in London as a wartime propagandist in 1942, Reston grabbed the chance to cozy up to *Times* Publisher Arthur Hays Sulzberger on a visit to London, impressing him with his soft voice and earnest manners. Sulzberger made Reston. Appointing him as his personal assistant, Sulzberger installed Reston on the fourteenth floor of the *Times*, where he was inducted into the *Times* empire and where he befriended the publisher's son-in-law, Orvil Dryfoos, the next in line for the post. Determined to make his mark, Reston angled his way into the Washington bureau in 1944. The crotchety head of the bureau, Arthur Krock, wanted none of Reston—"Mr. Reston," he later told *Time*, "is not exactly what you would call a cultivated man"—but by 1953 Reston had snagged his boss's job.



As bureau chief, Reston was in his element. Now he could staff the bureau with his boys—university-trained fellows who would smoke pipes, don button-down shirts, wear bow ties, call him "Scotty" and above all work unobtrusively as conduits for the politicians who ran Washington. Rocking the political boat was not an option. He and the *Times were* the boat. The propagandism Reston learned in wartime he perfected for the peace.

Already in 1945 when arch-isolationist Senator Arthur Vandenberg handed Reston a speech he planned to deliver championing engagement in Europe, Reston advised him to propose an alliance between the wartime powers opposing future German aggression. Reston claimed in his memoirs that he "was as surprised as everybody else when he delivered the speech ... including precisely this unprecedented proposal," but this was nonsense. Reston and Vandenberg were working hand in glove. Using Vandenberg as much as Vandenberg was using him, Reston burnished his reputation as a confidante of politicians.

Then there was Reston's 1953 arrangement with the State Department to publish the Yalta papers in full in the *Times* to prevent McCarthy and his henchmen from exploiting copies of the conference accords. Fearing the Senate Republicans would selectively cite exchanges between President Roosevelt and King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia in which Roosevelt referred to "kikes in New York," Reston, in his own words, "got straight into a cab and went straight to the Senate and saw the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Walter F. George of Georgia." After George agreed with Reston that full publication was preferable to leaks of the documents, Reston went to see John Foster Dulles and persuaded him to hand over copies. For Reston the concern was not that the documents were newsworthy but that they protected the Eisenhower administration from far-right attacks.

Reston's devotion to government leaders almost always exceeded his devotion to his readers. On the domestic front, he directed much of his energy toward advising friends such as Adlai Stevenson and Senator William Fulbright on how to campaign for office and set up government commissions. On the foreign policy side, he sat on knowledge that the United States was flying U-2 planes over the Soviet Union. And when it came to the Bay of Pigs, Reston was at it again; he advised the *Times* to soften the story by removing the word "imminent" from a story by Tad Szulc predicting an invasion. Kennedy later complained that he wished the *Times* had run with the story to head him off, and if Reston could have known that, no doubt he would have been just as eager to comply. Reston's eagerness to curry favor with presidents even extended to becoming a courier for them. In 1961, after Khruschev began stepping up the pressure on West Berlin, Reston visited Kennedy in Hyannisport, where Kennedy told him it would be "helpful" if Reston would report that the United States was prepared to go to war to protect Berlin. Reston actually submitted his column to Kennedy for inspection, and it contained the sentences "nuclear war ... is not unthinkable. It is, in cold fact, being thought about and planned...."

As the 1960s progressed, it became abundantly clear that an elite class of politicians was not infallible, but Reston refused to recognize reality. Reston believed, as he put in his 1966 book, *The Artillery of the Press*, that "clever officials cannot 'manipulate' reporters, and clever reporters cannot really 'beat' the government. From both sides, they have more to gain by cooperating with one another ... than by regarding one another as the enemy." He lived by his words. Appointed executive editor in 1968, Reston was intent on extending his snobbish Washington bureau approach to the New York headquarters. His dream was to create nothing less than an elite corps of correspondents handpicked from Harvard and Princeton who would roam around the globe to report on stories of their choosing. Like Reston, they would analyze the news rather than engage in the chore of collecting it. But the man who quashed Reston's plan was the same man who eventually pulled the *Times* out of

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its torpor and remade it: city desk editor A.M. Rosenthal.

Rosenthal, of course, was anything but a Reston man. He never attended an Ivy League school. He didn't wear button-down collars, rep ties and Brooks Brothers suits and speak in mellifluous tones about journalism serving the public weal. And so, once Reston floated his plan to the rebarbative Rosenthal, the inevitable fireworks erupted. Rosenthal, his face flushed, pounded his desk and shouted that he would resign if Reston went through with his scheme to outflank the newsroom. Reston flinched. "The fact was," wrote Harrison Salisbury in *Without Fear or Favor*, "Rosenthal had demonstrated that he had more balls than Reston."

It was the end of the Reston era. Slinking back to Washington, Reston also demonstrated that his capacity for relentlessly cheerful depictions of the American scene remained intact. Richard Nixon "covered up his good qualities." Henry Kissinger "was one of the most intelligent, imaginative, and effective public servants of his time." Or Reston would shake his head at the "recent silliness in Washington." Indeed, Reston's greatest contribution to journalism was his refusal of the editorship of *The Washington Post* in 1963. Had he accepted, there would have been no Watergate exposé. •

Syria's peace bluff.

JUST KIDDING

By Daniel Pipes

With near clock-like precision, Syrian-Israeli diplomacy makes front-page news every few months. Invariably, it's some new offer, and almost always it comes from the Israeli side. Last week, in the latest such incident, Prime Minister Shimon Peres made news by stating, in a meeting with President Clinton and an address to a joint session of Congress, his government's readiness to meet Syrian officials without preconditions.

But in the past, these flashes have disappeared as quickly as they emerged, which raises the question: Are Jerusalem and Damascus inching closer to an agreement, or has their four-year effort to make peace stalled? The answer, actually, is yes and yes. Negotiations have progressed, narrowing differences substantially. At the same time, the signing of a Syrian-Israeli peace treaty appears as remote as ever.

While it has gone generally unreported, the Syrian and Israeli governments—despite their tense relations—have quietly established the general contours of a peace agreement. In the four principal areas of negotiations, the two sides have no profound differences.

On the extent of Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights, a traditional stumbling block, the two sides barely disagree. Peres has said that "we are sitting on the Syrians' land," and he has made clear his willingness, in the context of an overall agreement and subject to a national referendum, to leave the Heights. The two sides must still haggle over the exact boundary: Israelis insist on the Mandatory (or international) border of 1923, while Syria's President Hafez al-Assad demands a withdrawal to the June 4, 1967, line. The difference between the two amounts to just twenty-five square miles—hardly a deal-breaker.

The two sides have also made considerable progress on the timetable of withdrawal. Jerusalem originally suggested three stages over eight years, while Damascus demanded a complete withdrawal in six months. By the beginning of 1995, the Israelis were down to four years and Syrians up to eighteen months. A compromise—akin to the three-year withdrawal from the Sinai agreed to with Egypt—is within sight.

Security arrangements on the Heights have also proved less of an obstacle than they once appeared. The Syrians began by arguing that for every mile of territory alongside the Heights that they demilitarized Israel must do the same. The late Yitzhak Rabin, noting that Syria is nine times as large as Israel, sought a nine-to-one ratio instead. By mid-1995, the Syrians offered a ten-to-six ratio, and the bargaining was underway. Israel's desire to maintain an early warning station or two on Mount Hermon remains highly contentious. Rabin declared that "on this issue there will be no compromise," while Assad made his opposition equally clear. Recently, however, Assad has hinted that he might accept Israeli airborne surveillance.

Finally, Jerusalem demands full normalization after the first stage of withdrawal. Rabin once defined this to include "an Israeli Embassy in Damascus, a Syrian Embassy in Israel, an Egged [i.e., Israeli] bus traveling to Aleppo, Israeli tourists in Homs, Israeli ships at Tartus, El Al planes landing, and commercial and cultural ties—everything, and in both directions." Assad initially refused to discuss normalization, saying this would only follow a complete withdrawal. With time, he made two concessions. First, he signaled that Israel could expect a "normal peace, of the type existing between 187 countries in the world," and on another occasion he spoke of "good ties with Israel, like Egypt and Jordan have." Second, he agreed to establish low-level diplomatic ties after a first, partial withdrawal of Israeli forces.

The substantive differences, therefore, are manageable. With American pressure, they could be solved within a matter of weeks or maybe months. But this probably will not happen because the central obstacle lies less in the international relations of the Middle East than in the much less widely discussed arena of Syrian domestic politics. At home, it is good for Assad to keep the peace process alive, but it would be very dangerous for him actually to reach a deal.

Assad's domestic position stems largely from his reli-

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gion. Many in the West assume he is Muslim, but few Muslims recognize him as a fellow believer. Rather, they see him as an 'Alawi, an adherent of the small, secretive post-Islamic religion found almost exclusively in Syria. This affiliation renders Assad an outsider in his own country.

As a small minority group, 'Alawis realize they cannot rule indefinitely against the wishes of almost 70 percent of the population. Given the brutal nature of Syrian politics, the resentful majority, were it to reach power, would probably exact a terrible revenge. To assure his community's survival, Assad must pursue two goals above all others. He must control Syria during his lifetime and then pass power on to his family and co-religionists.

Accordingly, Assad sees foreign relations less as the pursuit of abstract goals, or even of national interest, than as a means of regime survival. In this context, peace with Israel poses three threats. First, it would alienate Ba'th Party members and government employees, many of whom live off the huge military, and domestic security apparatus, that the Zionist threat justifies.

Second, other Syrians (especially businessmen and liberals) view peace with Israel as the beginning of a larger opening to the West. They see such an opening as a way to shed totalitarian rule, with its repression, poverty and global isolation. As a young professor at Damascus University puts it, "We will expect democracy if peace comes." Assad probably fears that perestroika would topple his government as it did Eastern Europe's dictatorships. Third, in his twenty-five-year reign, Assad has built a police state to protect him and his community. The prospect of greater openness, more democracy and flocks of Israeli tourists in the souks of Aleppo must make him fear that such changes would endanger the position of his family and of the 'Alawi community.

If he does not, in fact, seek peace with Israel, why then does the Syrian president pursue negotiations in an apparently serious manner? He has, after all, made concessions that bring a peace agreement within sight.

In all likelihood, Assad negotiates as a way to improve his standing in Washington. While peace itself would spell little but trouble, the negotiations bring many benefits. Assad's goal, then, is not peace but a peace process. He participates in negotiations without intending them to reach fruition. Engaging in apparently serious talks wins him improved relations with the West without forcing him to open up his country. Assad's international terrorist network rivals Iran and Libya's, but the U.S. does not ostracize Damascus to nearly the same extent. In 1994, President Clinton traveled to Damascus, and the U.S. allows American oil companies to operate in Syria, which it does not in Iran. To keep these benefits alive, Assad offers an occasional flourish (such as last week's call to Mr. Clinton as the latter was eating lunch with Shimon Peres), but while these titillate, they amount to little.

This approach worked best when Likud was in power, for Assad could rely on Yitzhak Shamir's government to maintain a hard line as well. Matters became more complicated when Rabin, who was ready to return virtually all of the Golan Heights, returned to power in 1992; Peres's flexibility puts even more pressure on Assad. Faced with such seriousness, Syria's leader has stalled. In the last twelve months, with talks ripe for a breakthrough, his negotiators have met with their Israeli counterparts in only one formal round. He refuses to unambiguously signal his good intentions to the Israeli population, and he claims to see no difference between a Labor and a Likud government in Israel. Indeed, he probably wishes there were none.

Because Assad's goal in the negotiations is to improve relations not with Jerusalem but with Washington, he is susceptible to American pressure. U.S. policy should exploit his fears so that he sees complying with American wishes as his best chance to keep his family and people in power. Washington should abandon the soft, more-in-sorrow-than-in-anger policy toward Damascus that has been in place since 1984 and adopt a much tougher approach. It could do so by speaking out against Syria's occupation of Lebanon or encouraging cooperation between Israel and Turkey, a prospect that frightens Assad.

An authoritarian leader like Assad responds to pressure, not jawboning or goodwill gestures. When Assad engages in activities contrary to American interests, he needs to hear about it. When he does something right, Washington should express less delight. Instead, with more equanimity, it should say, "Thank you; what will you give us next?" Hearing these words, and worried about hostile actions that might follow, Assad may make real concessions to American sensibilities and interests. He might even sign a peace treaty with Israel.

DANIEL PIPES is editor of the *Middle East Quarterly* and author of the forthcoming book *Syria Beyond the Peace Process* to be published by The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

A threat to financial journalism.

GOTCHA II

By James Cramer

Look out, the business-journalist police are at it again. This time they have set their sights on the biggest game of all, Jeff Vinik, the wildly successful manager of the country's largest mutual fund pool, the Fidelity Magellan Fund. Vinik's crime? He may have changed his mind about liking Micron Technology Inc., the giant semiconductor company, after he gave an interview to his company's quarterly report saying that the stock represented good value.

The problem, as the journalists see it, is that Vinik

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may have been selling Micron at about the time Magellan shareholders were reading that he owned the stock. The implication, buttressed by calls from most major newspapers to the Securities and Exchange Commission, is that Vinik was manipulating the price of Micron higher so he could get out at the public's expense.

The result? Short term, there will be demands that the SEC crack down on this type of behavior, and there will be allegations that Vinik's performance is somehow tainted; if he didn't have the press, in-house or otherwise, to hype his stocks his performance would recede to the run-of-the mill mean—or so the thinking goes. Longer term, however, the result will be clear: only a foolish or danger-loving portfolio manager will bother to air his views about what he likes or dislikes, for fear of being mau-mau'd by the muckraking personal finance journalists now aiming their guns at Vinik.

I ought to know. About a year ago I wrote a column for a personal finance magazine, *SmartMoney*, that spoke highly of stocks I was buying—not selling. When the stocks later climbed in price, I got ripped by *The Washington Post* and my competitors, *Money Magazine, Kiplinger's* and, of all people, Dan Dorfman (*Money*'s peripatetic columnist, now on paid leave pending an investigation by outside counsel) for writing about stocks I liked, even though I received virtually no financial gain from the momentary boost the stocks received. No matter that I didn't blast out of the stocks, the mere fact that I, as a portfolio manager, had access to the press as a writer was seen as criminal or unethical in itself. As a result, I am reluctant to ever again mention in the press what stocks I am buying, even though I would like to help make money for others beyond the handful of wealthy individuals who currently employ me to pick their stocks.

In my case and in Vinik's there were plenty of valid reasons for what we were doing. My editors asked me to write a piece about small capitalization stocks I was buying. Vinik, in early October, was asked what he thought of Micron. At the time Micron's fundamentals seemed strong, so he didn't hesitate to talk up the stock. But a few weeks later a glut developed in Micron's major product, dynamic random access memory chips, making the same company seem expensive at any price. Vinik began selling. I am sure he didn't even realize he was dumping stock just as shareholders of Magellan were getting a report saying he liked Micron. Vinik, like almost everybody else in the money performance business, is an active trader. He wasn't about to hold on to his Micron just because he gave an interview saying he liked it a month before.

Rather than drive all portfolio managers into discreet, unhelpful silence, journalists would do well to consider a few simple rules, which they can apply to both interview subjects and to those portfolio managers brave enough to take pen in hand these days.

The most important question is one of truth: namely, was the subject truthful about the fundamentals as he knew them and about whether he was buying or selling the stock at time of the article's creation. In other words, was Vinik lying about Micron's prospects in October when he gave the interview? Seems pretty preposterous to me, as he had been buying the stock for months.

Second, was an attempt made to update this view before press time? It would have been terrific if Fidelity's in-house spinmeisters had gone back to Vinik right before press time and asked him if he still had the same views on Micron. But this is often impractical since lead times for publications are much too long. Had he been interviewed by a national magazine about his views it would have been an obligation of the reporter or editor to check back before press time. But the onus should not have been on Vinik.

Finally, did his interview cause Micron stock to run up, and did he then take advantage of that momentary blip and unload the stock? This is the hardest point, and the one that is most subjective. It is entirely unlikely that Vinik moved Micron substantially with his interview. But what if he had? Then Vinik would really be no different than Warren Buffett, a famous investor who could easily buy a stake in a stock, tout it at a press conference and then blow it out for the gain that his hype created. We wouldn't like it if he did it, but Vinik would be justified in selling if the stock he hyped went up so much in value that he no longer regarded it as cheap. And he would be justified if he sold the stock after the run-up for another reason altogether—mass redemptions for his fund or an unexpected Federal Reserve rate hike, for example.

Perhaps, in the end, the possibility that a fund manager will take advantage of press publicity is just the price we pay to find out his views. As long as he discloses what he owned at the time of the article, we can't really ask for more. Nobody is forcing the public to buy any particular stock, and most people realize that fund managers talk up what they own. It would be hypocritical if fund managers were to recommend stocks they *don't* own, or worse, don't like, in order to avoid the appearance of conflict.

Yet, if the press continues to lynch managers who change their minds or who speak too highly of stocks, the only kind of investment advice we will receive from professionals in print is advice so well-vetted and innocuous as to be useless. Why bother to talk about what you like if you know it will come back to haunt you should you, for whatever reason, decide to sell it?

Worse yet, we will be stuck reading the advice of journalists themselves, who have taken an oath never to buy or sell stocks and write about them. If the choice is between taking stock advice from journalists who can't own stocks and portfolio managers who own them but might sell them if they jump up, I'll take the portfolio manager's advice any day of the week.

JAMES CRAMER is president of Cramer & Company and Bottom Line columnist for *New York* magazine.

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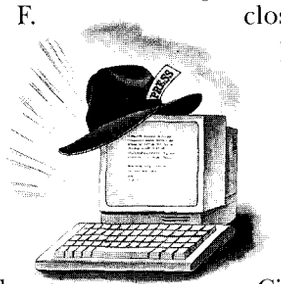
GEORGE ON MY MIND

By Judith Shulevitz

As a way for politicians to hoist themselves above the political fray, "post-partisanship" has been exploited by the best. Thomas Jefferson tested it out in his 1801 inaugural address with the remark: "We are all Republicans, we are all Federalists." John F. Kennedy updated it 161 years later: "Most of us are conditioned for many years to have a political viewpoint.... The fact of the matter is that most of the problems ... we now face are technical problems, are administrative problems." So when John F. Kennedy Jr. announced he was founding *George*, a magazine that "believes party affiliation alone no longer defines political identity" (as he put it later), you could easily imagine what was really going on: the son was getting ready to follow the father into the family business.



Loftily post-partisan, however, are not words that come to mind when *George* thuds, ad-laden, onto your desk. Cindy Crawford doing George Washington doing the Crazy Horse West? Robert De Niro imitating Napoleon? (Actually, it's supposed to be Washington again, but the Mediterranean features, stern glare and pinky ring make you wonder whether the shiny white wig was affixed to the wrong head.) Definitively post-Camelot may be more like it, though Kennedy Sr. might have appreciated the irony of turning the executive office into a *Playboy*-style spread. Underneath the glitz and silly costumes, though, *George* is surprisingly earnest, like the old college try at ... something. The prose has the posture of seriousness, the glumness of good intentions. There's even an undercurrent of apologia: *George* was forced to celebrity-monger, but it wants to get past that, and it wants you to know that it wants to get past that, and it has even come up with a way to communicate this complex self-understanding.

"Politics has migrated into the realm of popular culture," writes Kennedy solemnly in his first "Editor's Letter." "[M]uch of politics, like the movies, is about star power," he adds in the second, warming to his theme. His editors, forced to reconcile statecraft, "the most important business there is," as Adlai Stevenson put it, with pop culture, which can only discuss important business with ironic superficiality, have ingeniously managed to sidestep both: they've simply eliminated the distinction. At *George*, a magazine willing to offer up Madonna as a pundit and Statue of Liberty boxer shorts as a Christmas gift suggestion ($15 at Macy's nationwide), politics are the consumption of culture—political culture—as well as the culture of consumption. "We approach politics as you might—as skeptical consumers, for whom efficacy is at least as important as party loyalty," says Kennedy in his first "Editor's Letter." "American politics is intrinsically advertising masquerading as ideology," is how contributing editor Mark Leyner puts it in one of those lines that suddenly makes everything clear. Substitute the word "post-partisanship" for the words "American politics" and you grasp why *George* is such a weird thing to read: it's the first commercial magazine with the nerve to inflate its own urge to pander into a cultural diagnosis and political program. Nice work, if you can get away with it.

Can you? There are a few things that might hold the magazine back. The most significant is a sense of reality, insofar as any of us have one left. What's truly disconcerting about *George* is how insubstantial it can make political life seem. Take the weighty issue of power. The subject of *George* is not the politically powerful and the close to the politically powerful, which is what you might have expected from a celebrity political magazine, but which would have required the exploration of some actual, you know, opinion. The subject of *George* is, as Kennedy had announced it would be, folks behind the scenes, folks like you and me—or at least as much like you and me as soap-opera characters or Warren Beatty or Cindy Crawford are. Consider the pair of young activists interviewed for the second issue, one a pro-choice strategist, the other a conservative pollster. (Remember: post-partisan.) Ordinary people leading ordinary politically involved lives. Right? Well, the strategist is a blond babe who looks hot in a tight red dress and sticks her tongue out provocatively at the camera. The pollster is a Marla Maples clone wearing a houndstooth jacket and very fashionable shoes. *George* isn't about people who live and breathe politics; it's about people who photograph well or have money to throw around. People who are rich or beautiful, preferably both, and who have made political engagement work for them as a lifestyle choice. People, in other words, like Kennedy himself.

This Hyannisport-style populism helps explain how the editors came up with otherwise incomprehensible profiles: Alex Kozinski, the cute, sassy federal appeals court judge with the Supreme Court ambitions; Teresa Heinz, the handsome widow of one senator and wife/campaign financier of another; Heather Higgins, the sexy Republican trust-fund wonk, who's so handy with the Gingrichian platitudes—"Suddenly, ideas really matter!" It explains the relevance of the article about Julia Roberts's visit to Haiti, a piece free of detail on that troubled country but quite thorough on the difficulties of reconciling political activism with stardom ("Despite the mixed reviews she earned as a celebrity do-gooder, Roberts is determined to return to Haiti"). And it goes a

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little way, though not the entire distance, toward decoding the surreal goofiness of the magazine's one stab at what used to be called, pre-*George*, political discourse: *The Alienist* author Caleb Carr's much-maligned lead essay in the first issue, "The Next American Revolution Is Now." ("[T]erm-paperish"—*The Washington Post.*)

Frantic and overwritten, Carr's piece didn't make a point, in the conventional sense; it acted out what it would feel like to make one. *George* suffers from a similar crisis of meaning. For if it's too faux-populist to talk about the people who matter and too post-partisan to talk about anything else, what is the point of *George*? This is not the same as asking whether *George* has a reason for being. That it does, in spades. *George* is a public relations bonanza for just about everybody associated with it. It's been good for Hachette Filipacchi, a global company owned by the giant French missiles-to-media conglomerate, the Lagardere Group, which has been expanding its American holdings as fast as it can—in 1995 alone, Hachette bought *Premiere, Mirabella, Family Life* and *Video* and founded or helped found such publications as *Swing, Top Model* and *Orient Beauty.* But the company lacks the visibility, to say nothing of the credibility, of a Condé Nast, and *George* is designed to do something about that. And, of course, *George* gives Kennedy a job, a place in the dynasty. He's no longer the celebrity cipher, the man "well-known for his well-knownness," as Daniel Boorstin used to say. Being editor-in-chief of *George* gives John F. Kennedy Jr. the form of a political career, if not the content.

But still, you know, what's the point? Everything about *George* is blank, even the best-wrought prose (like that of contributors Leyner or Mim Udovitch). There's a startling absence of thesis paragraphs. Get to the point, I kept muttering to myself. The point of the story about David Wilhelm, a former Democratic National Committee chairman who just lost a Senate race is: Democrats are too nice for politics. The point of the article on "dial sessions"—instapolls of Americans conducted in motels around the country—is: the public will do anything for free soda and cookies. The point of Heather Higgins is: it really helps to have perky WASP looks and loads of cash if you want to get ahead in the Republican Party. The point of *George* is: there is no point.

That pointlessness is the point of *George* is not as far-fetched as it sounds. Pointlessness, after all, is a proven path to commercial success. The mandate of the glossy magazine in America is to be provocative and anodyne at the same time; media planners don't like negative content. That this makes *George* a pernicious development in the history of political journalism goes without saying. But not merely because it lowers the level of political discourse to that of an episode of *The Monroes.* But because it tries to fob off its infotainment as instructive journalism. It's a public service announcement for idea-free politics.

The fact is, ironic and post-partisan or not, most of us believe certain distinctions are made to be preserved. Remember the way Americans overreacted when Roseanne grabbed her crotch during the national anthem? Roseanne had made a brilliant career for herself turning sitcom conventions inside out. People loved her for it. So she was genuinely shocked when she applied her formula to yet another piece of show biz—the national anthem—and the fans in the stands went ballistic. But to them and to the television audience, the national anthem was not show business. It was not reducible to the light irony of a sitcom. You can quibble with the symbolism, but on the essentials Roseanne's critics were right: entertainment and politics are fundamentally asymptotic, no matter how much they appear to converge. *George* is insulting the way Roseanne was insulting. It's an affront to everybody who wants to believe that politics, no matter how empty, no matter how corrupt, can still change the way we live our lives.

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Cambodia's stubborn saint.

RAINSY DAY

By Philip Gourevitch

On a brief visit to Phnom Penh last January, Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott praised "the emerging triumph of democracy" in Cambodia. He wasn't listening to Sam Rainsy, the political figure voted most popular in Cambodia's first-ever public opinion poll. "On the surface, we have a constitution which established democracy," Rainsy told me last spring. "In fact, we live with a very authoritarian regime.... The general practices are of the communist style, not to insure justice for the people, but to consolidate and protect the power of those who are ruling.... The change is very cosmetic, and the heart of the problem is corruption. You can call the whole system the corruption system."

Such straight talk may make Rainsy a big hit with the people, but in October 1994, after an impressive year as finance minister, the Paris-educated international banker was ousted in a cabinet shake up. He has since been forced out of the National Assembly and the National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC), the political party he helped establish. Rainsy advocates desperately needed political and economic reforms so stubbornly that even supporters call him naïve. "He's dead right on the issues, and you wouldn't want to tell him to back down. But he's absolutely uncompromising," one Western human rights worker told me. A close friend of Rainsy's states the problem more bluntly: "The man stands an excellent chance of getting killed." But

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appeals to caution have little effect. Rainsy believes that it's fine to compromise within a democracy, but not to compromise democracy itself. And the Royal Cambodian Government—a creature invented by the United Nations—is, almost by definition, a compromised democracy.

A little history helps to understand why. The Maoist Khmer Rouge ruled from 1975 to 1978, the "zero years," as Pol Pot called his homeogenocidal experiment in making a *tabula rasa* of Cambodian civilization. Then the Vietnamese army invaded and installed a Stalinist puppet regime in Phnom Penh. Throughout the 1980s, Cambodia endured civil war between the Khmer Rouge, the Phnom Penh government and several other armies, most notably the royalist Armée Nationale Sihanoukiste. The Vietnamese began to withdraw in 1989, and in 1991 the warring factions agreed to disarm, hold elections and pursue democracy. For the next two years, the 22,000 peacekeeping troops of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) essentially ran the country as it prepared to hold an election.

Violence marred the campaign, and the Khmer Rouge ultimately refused to disarm and participate; still, nearly 90 percent of Cambodians voted in May 1993, and U.N. monitors declared the exercise "free and fair." Of the 120 seats in the new National Assembly, the reformist FUNCINPEC won fifty-eight and the former communist Cambodian People's Party (CPP) won fifty-one. Immediately, a clutch of CPP leaders threatened to resume armed struggle, but King Norodom Sihanouk—that great political chameleon who had run Cambodia from 1953-1970—brokered a truce: the FUNCINPEC leader, Sihanouk's son, Prince Norodom Ranariddh, would sit as First Prime Minister, and the CPP leader, Hun Sen, a former Khmer Rouge cadre and one of the leaders of the Vietnamese puppet regime, would be Second Prime Minister.

This unique co-premiership—the First and Second Prime Ministers were officially equal—may have saved the government from collapsing even before it could be established, but it effectively undermined the election results. Since the CPP retained control over the bulk of the bureaucracy, the judiciary and the military, sharing power meant that Ranariddh had to defer to Hun Sen, and not, as the vote had ordained, the other way around.

The U.N.'s effort to incubate Cambodia's test-tube democracy cost between $2 and $3 billion, and the Royal Government still relies on foreign donors for roughly half its annual budget of $410 million. This enormous investment explains the (self-) congratulatory praise for the new government from diplomats like Strobe Talbott. And for a while, the "Two Heads"—as the Khmer Rouge calls Ranariddh and Hun Sen—seemed to put on the show they were paid to deliver. But their increasingly belligerent stance toward domestic and foreign critics indicates that they are not interested in being good Western clients; they want to be powerful Cambodian rulers.

In July 1994, government tanks rolled through Phnom Penh following the suppression of an attempted coup. The incident provided a convenient pretext for the co-premiers to consolidate their power, and the National Assembly promptly outlawed membership in the Khmer Rouge, despite the fact that Pol Pot's cadres had nothing to do with the coup. FUNCINPEC had actually promised during the campaign to seek a negotiated settlement with the rebels, but as Sam Rainsy sees it, the government now needs war with the Khmer Rouge "because it permits them to commit so many human rights abuses and so much corruption." He told me that "if there was no Khmer Rouge, the government would invent one."

Tanks were on the streets of Phnom Penh again last month. They set the stage for the arrest of Sihanouk's half-brother, Prince Norodom Sirivudh, a FUNCINPEC leader who had shown support for Rainsy and emerged as a voice of democratic opposition within the government. Sirivudh was accused, on flimsy evidence, of plotting to assassinate Hun Sen, and his continuing detention under the anti-Khmer Rouge law on charges of attempting to destroy the government is described by Human Rights Watch/Asia as illegal. Ranariddh, however, has said that if Sirivudh hadn't been arrested he would have been killed. Cambodia's excellent English-language newspaper, *The Phnom Penh Post*, is reporting an air of pervasive menace in the capital: "Conversations are held in hushed tones with furtive glances over the shoulder, mobile phones are shut off or, in the case of embassies, confiscated before you enter the premises, and suggestions are often made to take a walk outside for fear of hidden bugs in people's homes or offices."

Sirivudh is only the most prominent victim of Cambodia's return to dictatorship. In the past year, at least three outspoken newspapermen have been assassinated, and each case has left a strong whiff of official complicity. Nobody has been brought to justice for these killings, and the courts have kept busy with the prosecution of editors who publish views unfavorable to government bosses. Human Rights Watch has noted that "on more than a dozen occasions over the last year, the Ministry of Information has ordered the closure, suspension, or confiscation of newspapers." In late October, the Watch reports, "the offices of Serei Pheap Thmei (*New Liberty News*) were ransacked by three truckloads of men armed with heavy poles and axes." One employee was injured, equipment was systematically smashed and $3,000 was stolen; the newspaper had criticized Hun Sen for sponsoring a development project that caused flooding in Kandal province. A few weeks earlier, grenades hit a crowd of followers of Son Sann, political rival to Information Minister Ieng Mouly. Human Rights Watch described the incident as "especially troubling," since both Mouly and Hun Sen had warned against such gatherings, predicting that "agitators might throw 'grenades.' "

The chastisements of human rights groups, however, are toothless without the diplomatic support of Cambo-

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dia's sponsors, and the donor countries have so far ignored Phnom Penh's abuses. The Royal Government, for its part, has helped its sugar daddies tie their own blindfolds. Last March, just before the annual meeting of the International Conference on the Reconstruction of Cambodia (ICORC), where donors gather to pledge funds for Cambodia's sustenance, the government postponed several suits against journalists and briefly tabled a new law that would criminalize many forms of free expression.

A week before the ICORC meeting in Paris, Sam Rainsy released a lengthy paper documenting government corruption, decrying the National Assembly's numerous legislative failures and calling on donors to demand greater accountability. He urged the check writers to "impose conditions," such as "the establishment of a true rule of law, the strengthening of democratic institutions and mechanisms, and guarantees that fundamental human rights will be respected." In Phnom Penh, rumors circulated of a contract for Rainsy's assassination, which seemed plausible since Ranariddh himself had warned that Rainsy's wife would end up "a widow."

The donor countries pledged hundreds of millions of dollars of new support to Cambodia without any conditions, and Rainsy told me, "I have been called the second Pol Pot by Hun Sen, because Pol Pot called for no foreign aid, and Hun Sen said I also tried to block foreign aid. So I will face the charge, and as long as the judiciary is not independent, and as long as they can use the police and the army for preserving their power, anything can happen."

There is a grim echo here: Rainsy's father, a minister to Prince Sihanouk in the 1960s, was assassinated for political reasons. "I'm not afraid," Rainsy told me. "I'm fortunate. I can to talk to you, I can talk to journalists—this is my best protection. So my concern is not for myself, but for others who can be killed and who can disappear without anybody noticing."

I was reminded of Benigno Aquino, who returned to the Philippines almost certain he would be assassinated. Aquino couldn't have known that his martyrdom would actually advance the anti-Marcos revolution he had lived for, but the conditions for such a scenario existed in the Philippines in a way that they do not now in Cambodia. When Rainsy recently launched a new political movement, the Khmer Nation Party, Ranariddh promptly declared it illegal. "Cambodia is now a mafia state," Rainsy told *The Far Eastern Economic Review* in November, in a chilling story on Cambodia's emergence as a center for drug trafficking and money laundering. Ironically, the Cambodian regime's failure to combat the narcotics trade could trigger the international censure that its political crimes have not and even, Rainsy suggested last week, provoke a Communist Party coup against Hun Sen.

A friend in Washington told me that while Sam Rainsy was here last summer he met with the ambassador of one of Cambodia's main patron states. The friend, eager to impress on Rainsy the foolhardiness of dicing with death, asked the ambassador whether Rainsy's assassination would affect his government's policy toward Cambodia's new rulers. The ambassador said, "Probably not."

That's the clearest statement of the post-cold-war world order that I've heard, and nobody understands its rules better than old strong-men clients with new titles, like Cambodia's co-premiers. With a bow here and a scrape there to their sponsors' hollow calls for democracy, they can act as illiberally as they like. After all, they can always say, we're not the Khmer Rouge.

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The alternative medicine scam.

BOGUS BEE POLLEN

By Sally Satel & James Taranto

Suspicious of the medical establishment, Americans are increasingly turning to unconventional remedies, from the plausible (chiropractic care) to the preposterous (past-life therapy). These "alternative" therapies have drawn the attention of Congress, which in 1991 created the Office of Alternative Medicine (OAM) within the National Institutes of Health. Unfortunately, the agency has turned out to be a case study in politicized science. It's an all-too-common pattern: legislators and policymakers, untrained in the scientific method, fail to distinguish genuine claims from false ones and sometimes, in a culture mistrustful of scientific authority, even take pride in their ignorance. In this case, the ultimate result may be to give a phony scientific imprimatur to snake oil.

The OAM was the brainchild of Iowa Senator Tom Harkin, whose fervor for alternative medicine grew partly out of his own experience: he claims that enormous doses of AllerBee-Gone brand bee pollen capsules cured his hay fever. As chairman of the appropriations subcommittee in charge of the National Institutes of Health, Harkin created the OAM with a mandate to study bee pollen and other offbeat remedies.

In concept it was a worthy endeavor. Evidence suggests that some alternative therapies, such as chiropractic manipulation for low back pain and acupuncture for pain and nausea, may be effective. Though largely unproven, alternative medicine is big business: in 1990, according to a Harvard study published in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, Americans spent over $10 billion on unconventional treatments, defined as those not usually taught in medical school or offered in hospitals—and that doesn't include insurance coverage for acupuncture, naturotherapy and chiropractic care. By

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systematically testing such therapies, the OAM would expand treatment options while protecting patients from quackery.

The office got off to a promising start with the appointment of Dr. Joseph Jacobs as its director. An American Indian familiar with the practices of Mohawk and Navajo medicine men, Jacobs is also a medical doctor, trained at Yale in pediatrics. He was determined to act as a "broker between the alternative medicine community and the orthodox medicine community," establishing credibility for alternative treatments within the NIH, which would apply the best scientific techniques in evaluating those that seemed promising. "Alternative medicine," Jacobs notes, "is only alternative until it's proven to work."

But Jacobs faced overwhelming political pressure to dispense with methodological rigor in favor of shortcuts that would render research scientifically useless. Harkin, impatient for results, didn't seem to understand that science is by nature slow and deliberate. During a June 1993 hearing, the senator blasted Jacobs because OAM-sponsored research, then only 18 months old, had produced no new treatments. Demanding that Jacobs speed things up, he declared: "[I]f I have to use the power of the purse strings, believe me, I know how...." The conflict between Harkin and Jacobs escalated as the senator handpicked four alternative-medicine advocates—none of whom is a physician or scientist—and persuaded HHS Secretary Donna Shalala to appoint them to the OAM's eighteen-member advisory council in early 1994, over Jacobs's vigorous objections. The council's formal role is limited to programmatic guidance, but the four "Harkinites," as Jacobs came to call them, wanted more.

The most vocal of them was Berkley Bedell, the man who introduced Harkin to bee pollen. Bedell, an Iowa fishing tackle manufacturer and six-term former congressman, told the 1993 hearing: "I fully realize that this background does not qualify me as one of the scientific experts on health. I happen to think that is good. I start with no preconceived beliefs on health care."

The other three Harkinites all have financial interests in alternative medicine. Gar Hildenbrand is executive director of Gerson Research Organization, which has ties to a cancer clinic in Mexico that dispenses, among other things, coffee enemas designed to stimulate the intestines to flush out toxins that supposedly cause cancer. Ralph Moss publishes a cancer newsletter that has soberly considered the idea that bras cause breast cancer. Frank Wiewel, a former recording engineer, runs an organization called People Against Cancer that serves as a travel agency for patients desperately seeking treatments illegal in the U.S.

Soon after their appointment, the Harkinites attacked Jacobs's plan to sponsor three or four alternative medicine research centers at top medical schools. Those facilities would teach biostatistics and data-gathering techniques, providing alternative medicine researchers with the tools to design studies, collect reliable data and interpret their findings objectively. But the Harkinites rankled at the idea of supporting "big-name" medical schools, where they thought the faculty would be hostile to them, and pressured the OAM to abandon Jacobs's plan. Instead, the office created two facilities, at the University of Minnesota's Center for Addiction and Alternative Medicine Research and at Seattle's little-known Bastyr University.

Worse, the Harkinites assailed Jacobs for his insistence on methodological rigor. Bedell, for instance, touted small-scale "field" studies in which researchers examine local practitioners' case records to determine whether their patients' symptoms were reduced or eliminated after treatment. Though such studies can be useful for deciding whether a remedy warrants serious clinical testing, they can't determine by themselves whether a treatment is truly effective. For one thing, they cannot rule out the placebo effect. Nor can they determine whether a patient has improved because he already received conventional treatment or because his condition simply went away on its own.

To determine whether a treatment is effective, researchers need to use far more systematic techniques, such as the classic "double blind," in which patients are randomly assigned to an experimental group that gets treated and a control group that gets the placebo, and neither researchers nor subjects know which group is which. Not all alternative therapies lend themselves to such a method. But researchers can construct scientifically reliable tests by assigning patients randomly and then performing a sham intervention on the control group (inserting acupuncture needles near but not on the spots believed to have therapeutic effect) or administering a smaller "dose" of treatment (a less vigorous massage).

The Harkinites, however, were relentless in pressing Jacobs to conduct field studies. Bedell told a recent conference that while "the technique might not be as scientific as some would like," an impatient public is clamoring for new products like the bee pollen that supposedly cured Harkin's allergies. Faced with a mandate that would destroy the OAM's scientific integrity, Jacobs resigned in September 1994. He remains bitter. "It's pathetic," he says. "They were so naïve about science. I wouldn't trust anything coming out of the OAM as long as the Harkinites are micromanaging it."

And what about the bee pollen that helped Senator Harkin's interest in alternative medicine to flower? The OAM's planned study never got off the ground, perhaps because the maker of the capsules Harkin took, Royden Brown of the CC Pollen Company, paid $200,000 in a consent decree in 1993 to the Federal Trade Commission for making false claims about his product's curative powers. Bee pollen illustrates the dangers of unproved therapies: while there's no scientific evidence that it cures allergies, there have been reports in medical literature of life-threatening allergic reactions to it.

We shouldn't be surprised at such results when we entrust scientific decisions to non-scientists. Politicians

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invariably have to mediate between interest groups that are pursuing money or publicity, not truth. "Everybody used to come and lobby me," says one disgruntled OAM source. "Sometimes I'd want to jump in the shower afterward because some of them were so slimy—especially the offshore cancer clinics. They'd always say they had a cure, but when I asked over and over for data, they never came through."

But even well-intentioned decision-makers may be unqualified to evaluate competing scientific claims. In an article for the new magazine *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*, Senator Harkin decries "the unbendable rules of randomized clinical trials." "In my much-publicized victory over allergies through the use of bee pollen," Harkin writes, "did I need someone to show me exactly how that was accomplished in order to experience the results I did? Of course not! And it is not necessary for the scientific community to understand the process before the American public can benefit from these therapies." He's missing the point. The purpose of controlled studies is precisely to test the effectiveness of a therapy. Only rarely do they tell researchers *why* something works.

Notwithstanding Congress's budget-cutting fervor, the House of Representatives in August voted to increase the OAM's funding by $1.9 million, at the urging of Representative James Moran of Virginia, whose daughter received shark cartilage treatment for a brain tumor. "We need some professional analysis," Moran declared on the House floor. "We need random trials that are done in a professional, scrupulous manner."

He's right—but we won't get them by spending more money on an agency that has rejected scientific scruples.

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ACCRA POSTCARD

MISS GHANA

By Liesl Schillinger

"Ah, Kweku, Kweku, you know what I love about Fantis?" Victor asked. "They know how to take a joke." The audience howled with laughter as Victor did his classic imitation of the Fanti dialect. "Now the Ashanti...." he continued, beaming with the success of his routine. "Everyone knows their problem." More laughter. "Nice one, Victor," Kweku said appreciatively, and strode over to join his co-host. Smug, smiling, suited and not a little scared, Victor and Kweku paced back and forth across the stage of Ghana's National Theater in Accra, amid balloons and banners and between two mammoth illuminated plastic cigarette boxes that whirred erratically on stands at either side of the stage curtain. It was Catskills humor, far, far east, it was "The Gong Show" without irony, it was the fourth hour of the Miss Accra Beauty Pageant, and it was past midnight. Despite hours of desperate pleading, not a single woman had offered herself up as a contestant, and it looked as if anybody who had ever wondered what would happen if there were a beauty pageant and nobody came was about to find out.

As Victor ran through his patter of canned jokes (OK, there were three priests: a Roman Catholic priest, a Baptist priest and a Jewish priest..."), Kweku squeezed up every dram of charm he possessed to cajole the women in the crowd into leaving their seats. "Please," Kweku implored in his battered Cockney accent, clasping his hands. "There are so many lovely ladies out there, we just need *two* of you, and we can have the contest. Or *three*. If we get three people, we will go." There was no movement, except of women in the audience ducking their heads and sinking low in their seats.

The funny thing was, the theater was crammed with hundreds of young women who looked as if they had just stumbled off a runway and who could have had no illusions about the purpose of the evening. Usherettes in red satin strolled down the aisles handing out fizzy lemon drinks, and the varnished hands that took them were attached to young women slick with satin, studded with rhinestones and elaborately colonnaded and pomaded with gravity-defying hairdos. Looking at the way their gold shoes matched their handbags and hair bows, the way that lipstick magically frosted their faces, it was hard not to suspect their coyness was disingenuous.

"Gentlemen!" Kweku implored. "Please talk to the lady next to you. I beg you to please get her to come up. Just turn and look next to you." He pointed at a woman in the crowd. "Madam, go for it. It's late. And we have—" he slipped seamlessly into a "Price is Right" bellow of amazement, "a Daewoo Cielo car for the first-prize winner. Ladies," he crooned, "if you don't know how to drive, we'll throw in a chauffeur. *And*," he resumed impressively, "We're talking a quarter of a million cedis *cash* to the winner. And don't forget, *lovely* Domod cooking pots for all the winners." Kweku's appeal was met by snickers. The pots had not been much of a selling point even at nine, and by twelve they had decidedly lost their luster. "I'd like to remind you girls that beauty is the first gift nature gives you," Kweku said philosophically. "But it is not enough. We can give you more—cash, and prizes. Come backstage." Victor broke in, speaking in a forthright Ghanaian accent devoid of all foreign art, speaking like brother to sister. "Lady," he said, addressing all womanhood, "please come." No one moved. Kweku assumed a wounded expression. "What hurts me," he murmured despondently into his mike, "is that people are paying money to see a good show. It's sad to see that you ladies won't

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help make the evening a success. Oh, I wish I had two sisters tonight." If Kweku had hoped that guilt would accomplish what vanity would not, he hoped in vain.

I had come to the Miss Accra Beauty Pageant as the guest of Audrey Gadzekpo, a forceful and humorous young woman who holds most of the feminist posts Ghana offers. Audrey, who is Accra's answer to Camille Paglia, writes a feisty, popular column for the weekly paper *The Mirror*, edits Ghana's best women's magazine, *AWO*, which she founded, and teaches journalism at the University of Ghana at Legon—a position that is at this point mostly honorary, as the university had been closed for half a year (as usual) because of strikes. Tonight, Audrey was expanding her repertoire by serving as one of five judges for the pageant. She didn't find anything anomalous in the idea that Ghana's leading feminist thinker would take part in a beauty pageant. "For me, beauty contests fall within the realm of frivolous entertainment, much like boxing, body building, sumo wrestling and bull fighting," she said. "It is a necessary escape from the life of drudgery that some of us lead."

Why, I asked her, were the women so reluctant to come to the stage? "It's not that they're modest," Audrey stage-whispered from her front-row judge's seat, directly in front of me. "It's just that they don't want to seem like they're conceited. That's our culture. Besides," she said, "none of them came here expecting to go up, and, if you ask me, the women think that beauty contests are silly." Then why have a beauty contest at all? I asked. "Good question," Audrey said, laughing. She offered no further explanation, but it began to seem as if the Accra pageant was nothing more than a grudging concession to barbaric Western customs. As a matter of national pride, Ghana would want to have a contestant in the Miss World contest, so *someone* was going to have to belly up to the stage and claim the Embassy Pleasure cigarettes she would never smoke (smoking is considered low-class and shameful in Ghana—only expats and people who work with them do it) and undergo all the rest of the drudgery of pageantry.

American women who are fond of the Cinderella myth, conversant in the pageant-driven apotheoses of Bess Myerson and Vanessa Williams and inured to the existence of the Miss America contest, may assume that the appeal of beauty contests is pretty much the same the world over. They would be surprised to learn that no little girl in Ghana grows up dreaming that she might one day slip the sash that proclaims her Ghana's chief beauty over her slim shoulder, or win the right to wear a tiara. I quizzed men and women in the audience, asking them why the women were so uninterested in the ceremony, and their answers were impressive. They explained patiently and amusedly that the contest was a joke divorced from anything they considered important. It sounded so progressive.

And then they explained a little more deeply, and I was not so sure that what they were describing was progress. As I had observed in my travels throughout Ghana, young women here do not display their bodies overtly; and, except for the daughters of the very rich and powerful, they do not wear pants. What they do, mostly, is keep covered, work hard and look for husbands. For that reason, an usherette explained, the women in the audience who were younger than 25—the cut-off age for the pageant—would be hesitant to display themselves publicly for fear of getting a reputation as vain, ungovernable girls whom nobody would want to marry. And—she added—a woman of that age might be embarrassed to have her humiliating single status broadcast to the pitying audience.

As "The Closer I Get to You" thrummed deafeningly from the theater speakers, Victor and Kweku began to snap nervously. Eager for resolution, I turned to the two drop-dead gorgeous fashion plates who sat behind me, serene in ivory silk, and whispered, "Do it! Do it!" "No," they said, and began twittering. "Why not?" I hissed back. "We are mommies and wives," they protested, and began giggling uncontrollably. Minutes later, Victor descended the stair at the side of the stage and strode into the audience. "You," he pointed at a woman in the middle row. "Madam, I like your red dress. Come up and get a pack of Embassy Pleasure cigarettes. Are you single and Ghanaian?" She didn't respond, but her friends nodded. Victor triumphantly lassoed her—and off she went. "Two more to go," Kweku crowed.

After the first cookie was out of the jar, the rest came easily. Two girls walked up to the stage with Victor, heads held low, and promptly fled to the safety of the curtains. Another woman, tall, haughty and shapely, dressed in a tight, short houndstooth suit, was led up by her boyfriend, who walked onstage with her, turned her around for public inspection with proprietary pride and handed her off to Kweku. Half an hour later, ten women had been wheedled, threatened and pulled backstage, and the wild rumpus could start. Only they had to be registered and measured before we could see them.

I went to the bar in the big shiny hallway outside the auditorium and found it crowded with eighty-odd revelers who had given up entirely on the pageant. Patrick Davis, a medical student at the University of Ghana at Legon, consoled himself by drinking a Club beer as he berated his countrywomen for what he saw as "backwardness." "Last week it was the same thing," he complained. "I went to a bikini contest at Labadi Beach, and no women came. We were there five hours. Because of modern advancement, our women have started to put themselves forward, but they are very slow," he said. "I think by the time they are like American women, I will be dead."

Returning to my seat, I arrived just in time to see Penelope Jones Mensah walk onto the stage, to the tune of the Bee Gees' "How Deep Is Your Love." She looked sleek, noble and disgruntled, like a cat that has been teased beyond tolerance. When Kweku introduced her as "Pen-e-lope," she snapped, "That's Pen-e-lo-pee." She admitted to being a law student and said she liked reading Jeffrey Archer. Kweku proceeded to give her mea-

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surements, which did not seem to belong to any recognizable standard. She was 31-28-40, he proclaimed. Jenny Aban, who enjoyed "reading and listening to music" and was working in the national service teaching children, measured up to 34-38-21, while Florence Broango, who also loved reading, measured 32-28-35. Sharon Taylor, who was rich and pale and observed that her wealth gave her good connections, said she liked swimming and reading Enid Blyton, and she measured 34-24-40. The audience did not warm to her. Penelope Jones Mensah won—and it turned out she had been Miss Legon before becoming Miss Accra.

They had all protested too much. Certainly Penelope Jones Mensah had known she would compete that evening and might have helped out the sleep-deprived audience well before midnight; but she had a contest to play with rules far subtler than the ones I had assumed. As a Ghanaian woman, her only chance at winning was to convince the audience that she did not want to enter. As I left, headed for home, I found myself possessed of an unexpected emotion: respect for the tired old Miss America Pageant.

LIESL SCHILLINGER is a freelance writer.

And Democrats should get over it.

IT'S CHRISTMAS: LET'S MEANS-TEST!

By Matthew Miller

With the budget battle reaching its crescendo, it's time to test your understanding of what the Democratic Party stands for. The federal government gives $15 billion yearly in Social Security to households with incomes above $100,000, even though they're getting back between two and five times what they paid into the system while they worked. The feds also give $15 billion in housing subsidies via the mortgage interest deduction to these elite $100,000 earners, while the majority of Americans, who rent, get no subsidy at all. Finally, the government pays out $15 billion yearly (only this last is called "welfare") to 5 million poor single moms and their 9 million children. In their balanced budget plan, Republicans pretend the first two don't exist and cut only this latter payment to poor people. Now the test: in the latest budget the White House released, on December 7, the president's record-breaking third of the year, what do Democrats do? *Exactly the same thing.*

If something seems wrong with this picture, join the confused club that can't see why a party that's supposed to look after the little guy wants to keep virtually all the $200 billion in entitlements and tax subsidies that go yearly to Americans who earn more than $50,000 untouched in this year's great fiscal debate. It's such a topsy-turvy world that when the GOP called in September for higher premiums for well-off Medicare beneficiaries, it was the Republicans who were going after the rich and Democrats who were defending the entitlements of the wealthy. "It makes no sense whatsoever in today's world to have government subsidize millionaires," California Republican Bill Thomas told "The MacNeil-Lehrer NewsHour." Meanwhile, over on "Face the Nation," Leon Panetta shrugged. "[I]f you don't have to do it," he asked, "why do it?"

Why do Democrats shrink from "means-testing" federal benefits—that is, scaling them back for those with higher incomes—to help get our fiscal house in order? Especially when there's no fiscal fix that better fulfills the party's passion for fairness? The answer goes beyond this month's political tactics or even next year's electoral strategy. It lies instead in a hidden anguish over warring impulses at the heart of the Democratic creed, principles so fundamental and, as the budget outlook proves, so at odds, that Democrats' first response, as with anyone experiencing deep emotional conflict, is denial. It's the showdown between the Democratic commitment to universal entitlement programs and their belief that, in a progressive society, those who are better off should bear greater burdens. This duel for the Democratic soul will not be resolved in this year's budget endgame. But this collision between first principles, between universalism and means-testing, will cast a shadow over everything the Democratic Party does for the next decade. The wrong choice could spell the end of what reasonable people in both parties expect from government. Yet the amazing thing is that many Democrats don't sense the choice is upon them or grasp its stakes.

To understand the crossroads Democrats have reached, you need first to go back to our fiscal future. In 1963, entitlements accounted for just 30 percent of federal spending. Today these programs—mainly Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and military and civil ser-

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vice pensions—make up more than 60 percent of the budget. By 2003, they'll rise to 72 percent. As our population ages and health and pension costs soar, the remaining "discretionary" portion of the budget, funded by annual appropriations, is shrinking fast. At this rate, by 2010, when the baby boom retires, entitlements and interest on the debt will take up all available revenue, meaning there won't be a cent left for the FBI, the Pentagon, the national parks or the myriad other activities that even today's Republican zealots bless. Nor will there be a dime to bolster our lagging R&D, education and infrastructure investments, where we've trailed Germany and Japan for years. Instead, as Nebraska Senator Bob Kerrey puts it, government will have become a "giant ATM machine," taking in 20 percent of GDP and transferring it out again via entitlements.

Then, if it's possible, things get worse. As we near 2020, federal spending will head toward 30 percent of GDP and beyond, while taxes hover in the range of 20 percent. This means unthinkable budget deficits four and five times their current size, which would wreck the economy. Health reform, by the way, won't inoculate us against these demographics. Even if health costs per American grew no faster than the economy after 2000 (a major achievement), for example, federal health spending would still double by 2030.

To avoid bequeathing "ATM government" and deficit-induced calamity to the rising generation, there are only three options. Taxes must go up a lot; entitlements must be cut substantially (with means-testing the biggest saver); or some combination. Here's where Democratic denial comes in.

When I served in the Clinton administration, I discussed these issues with Alicia Munnell, then assistant Treasury secretary for economic policy, and now a member of the president's Council of Economic Advisers. Munnell is an articulate traditional Democrat who opposes means-testing. Her argument, which resembles those made by like-minded think tankers and members of Congress, goes as follows. First, we already means-test programs to some extent, both through progressive benefit formulas (like Social Security's) and by treating most benefits as taxable income. But most important, the universal nature of programs like Social Security and Medicare, into which everyone pays and knows they'll get out what they're supposed to, is precisely what assures their political viability. Alter this by explicitly scaling back benefits for well-off Americans and you'll stigmatize these programs as "welfare." Wealthier Americans will decide there's nothing in it for them and will vote to opt out of the system. Before long, the whole notion of social insurance, and the transfers to needier citizens that take place within it, will erode. "Bribing" better off citizens to maintain their support is a reasonable price to pay for the social good these programs bring.

It's not clear that this argument is compelling. First, since the universalist position acknowledges that we already redistribute money via programs that nonetheless enjoy wide support, why should making them a little more progressive put us on the slippery slope they fear? A December *New York Times* poll, for example, showed 78 percent support for raising Medicare premiums for upper-income beneficiaries. Other polls have shown 60 percent support for the means-testing concept more broadly.

Still, for argument's sake, let's take universalist political theory as gospel. There's one problem. It doesn't hold up if you plan on living much past the year 2000. Why? Democratic economists like Munnell are also concerned about the deficit-related savings and investment gap and the way entitlements are gobbling up the budget, thus tying government's hands in the face of new national needs. The only way to maintain universal entitlements while also fixing the budget is for taxes to rise sharply as a share of GDP. That's hard to imagine given the political climate of the 1990s. So I asked Munnell the central question facing today's thoughtful universalist: Given that huge tax increases aren't likely anytime soon, why does her concern for universalism *trump* her concern for long-term economic growth and generational equity? Her answer: she hadn't thought of it that way before.

I posed the same tradeoff to Robert Ball, who served as commissioner of Social Security from 1962 to 1973 and who stands today as the elder statesman of the universalists. "What did Alicia say?" was his initial, seemingly stumped, response. He hadn't thought of it this way, either. Then the vehemence of his answers surprised me. "I don't want to accept that we can't have higher taxes," he said. "I don't believe politicians who say 'never.'... I don't see why I should take your premise and stew on it." Ball isn't wrong to be dubious about no-tax pledges. In the early 1980s, as he points out, everyone said we'd never tax Social Security benefits. Now both parties have, and have lived to talk about it. Still, I wondered how many years Americans my age (I'm 34) should forgo the push for means-testing and wait for Ball's hoped-for tax increase to solve the mess. "In my case, it won't matter much," Ball told me. "I'm so old, I can probably run it out—that'll be *your* problem." We laughed; he was joking. But for my generation it's not really funny. For Democrats, whose constituents stand to lose the most if government is hamstrung and wages continue to stagnate, it shouldn't be funny either.

At least Democratic economists, once you push them, are honest enough to say they're counting on an eventual tax hike to reconcile otherwise irreconcilable objectives. But Democratic politicians certainly aren't talking about big tax increases and probably won't for years. What explains their resistance to means-testing? According to Utah's Bill Orton, a third-term House Democrat and sponsor of the centrist "Coalition" budget, it comes down to purity and denial. "The problem," he says, "is that the Democratic Party is viewing reality as they'd like it to be, not as it really is." Orton and the minority of farsighted Democrats who "get it" worry that in piously defending

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universality and the budget juggernaut that comes with it, Democrats tragically abet GOP plans to scrap many programs, including those for the needy, since there won't be enough money to pay for it all.

Listen to the friendly disagreement Orton had recently with California Democrat Pete Stark, and you'll see the contradictions at work. Orton supports increased Medicare premiums for the well-off; Stark is opposed. Not surprisingly, Stark comes up billions short in trying to balance the budget. Where does Stark want to make up the money? From deeper savings in Medicaid? "No." From cutting below a hard freeze in discretionary spending? "Oh, absolutely not." So where are you going to get it, Orton asks. "Well, we can't do it [a balanced budget] in seven years, then ... we'll have to stretch it out." Until the very eve of the baby boom's retirement, that is, when the problems explode geometrically.

Retiring Wyoming Senator Alan Simpson, a Republican, says Democrats who scorn means-testing are guilty not just of confusion, but of "hypocrisy with a capital 'H.'" "Can you imagine anything more phony?" he asks. "I say to Ted Kennedy, 'That's a wonderful speech you gave about the rotten rich. I've got a great idea for you. Let's not give them a COLA [a cost of living adjustment for Social Security].' He just sort of smiles at me."

Bob Kerrey, the Democrats' lonely leader on these issues, now tries a new way of backing his colleagues into the requisite re-education. He doesn't lead with the case for means-testing anymore. Instead he says, "You tell me, Senator Kennedy—what percent of the budget do you want to go to appropriated accounts?" With discretionary spending falling toward 25 percent or less of the budget a decade from now, aggressive liberals might want to hold the line at 30 or 35 percent. Guess what kind of reform that implies?

The inexorable facts have even persuaded liberal beacon Mario Cuomo. "You should not be satisfying *wants*," runs Cuomo's current mantra, which presumably includes Social Security for Leona Helmsley or Rush Limbaugh's mortgage interest deduction, "when *needs* are unmet." Still, getting Cuomo to talk specifics, even though he's no longer seeking votes, is like pulling teeth. It's a good lesson in modern Democratic psychology. Cuomo takes a conversation about means-testing and turns it to why we should be cutting defense and not cutting capital gains. Fair enough for this year's battle, Governor, but what about our long-term problems, which even vaporizing the Pentagon won't solve? He doesn't like the phrase "means-testing"; it carries too much baggage. OK, then, how about "scaling back benefits for those with higher incomes?" Yes, he says, we should raise Medicare premiums for richer folks, and we will. But, Governor, that's just the tip of the iceberg, as you know. What about Social Security? "To be intelligent and consistent," he says, "we should do the same thing for Social Security COLAs for those who don't need it." Just their COLAs? What about the billions in benefits to well-off seniors that represent multiples of what they paid into the system? "We should do it in Social Security and Medicare—and defense," he says at length, in a kind of fiscal version of a wrestler's "uncle." "The question," he adds, in a weary tone that suggests the difficulty, "is where you draw the line."

Cuomo's right. Means-testing Medicare premiums raises just $5 billion a year. Phasing out Social Security and Medicare entirely for the $100,000-and-over crowd might get you $20 billion. But you have to go lower on the income scale to get real savings. The bipartisan Concord Coalition's plan, for example, leaves the 60 percent of Americans who earn less than $40,000 untouched. Starting above that, and on a steeply progressive basis, Concord would scale back an increasing portion of entitlements as income rises. People earning $60,000, for example (80 percent of Americans earn less), would give up 20 percent of their expected benefits. Someone earning $180,000 would forgo 85 percent. Even at the highest incomes, people would still get something, so that participation, if not full "entitlement," remains universal. Together with increasing the retirement age to 68 by 2007, Concord's means-test saves $200 billion over five years.

On the tax subsidy side, a sound means-test would require everyone, whatever the tax bracket, to take itemized deductions, such as those for mortgage interest or charitable contributions, at the 15 percent rate. Under today's system, the richer you are, and thus the higher your tax bracket, the bigger the subsidy these deductions provide. ($1,000 in deductible mortgage interest for a 39 percent earner is worth $390; for a 15 percenter it's worth $150.) The battle cry would be populist: Why should a millionaire's mortgage be worth more to him than yours is to you? This "15 percent solution," which affects just one in eight taxpayers, saves $300 billion over five years. Together with the Concord-style approach (which liberals might think of as a progressive tax applied to the spending side), these comprehensive reforms deliver more savings in five years than President Clinton's latest budget does in seven. Means-testing would thus let Clinton avoid all the whacks in housing, transportation, R&D and other programs his current timidity requires while bankrolling new public investments as well.

To be sure, the need for choices like these makes clear why it's not as much fun to be a politician these days. But, as a wise man said, if you have no choice, you have no problem. If sharply higher taxes are out for the foreseeable future, Democrats—indeed, both parties—have no choice. And the onus *is* on Democrats. Despite GOP "courage" on Medicare premiums, Republicans will never take the lead on broader means-testing; these are still "Democratic programs," after all. Only Nixon could go to China. That's why, for all the barbs flying between Republicans and Democrats this holiday season, the debate inside the Democratic Party is the most interesting and consequential now taking shape. They may not get there this year, or next. But sooner or later, like Dr. Strangelove, Democrats will have to stop worrying and learn to love means-testing. •

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An inquiry into the ultimate apostates.

GOY STORY

By Amanda Onion

When Craig Miller read in a local newspaper that Hope of Israel, a Russian branch of Jews for Jesus, was inviting the Russian Jewish community to a Chanukah party a little over a year ago, he called every rabbi in the neighborhood. In thirty minutes he had convinced one of them, Rabbi Samuel Berger, to host an alternative Chanukah party at his synagogue. Four days later, on Saturday, December 3, 1994, nearly ninety Jewish demonstrators with long black coats and beards milled in front of the Methodist church in Sheepshead Bay. As Russian immigrants shuffled through the church's red doors, the men outside yelled, "You call yourselves Jewish and you walk into a church?" They invited the crowd to step into one of their three waiting vans and ride to their "real" Chanukah party down the street where Chanukah menorahs, *latkes* (potato pancakes) and *sufganiot* (doughnuts) cluttered the tops of three long tables. "We didn't do everything ourselves, we got the community involved," Miller said. "It turned out to be a phenomenal experience."

"Phenomenal" is not how the leader of Hope of Israel, Greg Zhelezny, describes that evening. The commotion in front of the church brought five police cruisers and one police van to the scene. "They were pushing, and I told them 'Don't push people,' " Zhelezny recalled. "This one man started cursing me to my face. He would not stop. So I told him, you know what I said? I said, 'I love you.' "

The number of Jews accepting Christ as the Messiah and joining Messianic (Christ-believing) Jewish groups in this country is growing every year. Rabbi Tovia Singer, director of Jews for Judaism of Greater New York, an anti-missionary group, estimates that so far, more than 300,000 Jews have become involved in Messianic Jewish groups. Stan Telchin, an author and major figure in the Jews for Jesus movement, puts it a different way. He points out that more Jews have "received" Jesus since 1967 than at any other time in the past 2,000 years.

In New York, Messianic Jewish missionaries are targeting the Russian immigrant population in Brooklyn. This is time and money strategically spent. The New York Association for New Americans counts more than 200,000 Russian Jews who have touched down in New York City. Nearly 13,000 arrived last year. By the year 2000, the Russian community could make up a quarter of the city's Jewish population. Russian Jews are being courted not only for their numbers, but also because their religious backgrounds are so undernourished. Under seventy-five years of communism, and even today in a notoriously anti-Semitic nation, many Russian Jews connect their heritage with persecution rather than religion. They are, therefore, more likely to accept the Messianic missionaries' notion that the Jesus-believing Jew is a "fulfilled Jew" or a "completed Jew."

The fifth line on internal passports in the former Soviet Union lists nationality. This is where Nastya Zhelezny's passport reads "*Yevrey*"—Jew. In Russia, she explained, that identity rendered only ill treatment. "If you're walking down the street and somebody is not in a good mood and he sees your Jewish nose, he says, 'You . . . . ' " Nastya checked herself: "Well, you can fill in a word. Sometimes the only reason I knew I was Jewish was because I got cursed as I walked down the street."

In 1990, when Nastya was 14, her family left their home in Kiev, Ukraine, and moved to Italy while waiting to be granted entry to the United States. It was in Italy that Claudia Zhelezny walked into her first synagogue. Her daughter remembered, "It was a synagogue for Russians so we started going because my mom was looking for spiritual things. A couple of times she did some rituals wrong and she got yelled at." Intimidated, the Zheleznys stopped attending. Nastya's older brother, Igor, remembers their time in Italy as painful. "We were sort of nowhere," he said.

Then, one day, Igor found the "American Club." Unlike most people in his temporary home, the people at the club impressed him with their interest in books and spirituality and the difficulties of immigration, and, better yet, they *listened* to him. The "American Club" began to soothe the emptiness that had gnawed at him since his family left Kiev. "It turns out they were missionaries," Nastya said of the group. "They had a meeting there, and there were English classes and when we came there, the first thing we heard was 'We love Jews.' And it was so strange for us because everyone had always hated us."

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By the time the Zheleznys arrived in New York two months later, the three were devoted believers in Jesus. A year later, Igor met people from Jews for Jesus, and the Zheleznys found a way to link their Jewish heritage and their newfound belief. It was Igor (now called Greg) Zhelezny who suggested to New York Jews for Jesus Director Mitch Glaser three years ago that he start a Russian branch in Brooklyn. Now, Nastya and Greg's new wife, Inna, lead the religious songs that fill the Methodist church. Greg delivers sermons in Russian, and Claudia, who has been working as a full-time missionary for Jews for Jesus, concludes each service with a long prayer, whispering "*Gospodi, Gospodi*" ("God, God").

Rabbi Singer understands that the faith of most Messianic Jews is sincere. "We have to walk humbly in this issue," he says. "The success of the movement really represents the unpaid bills of the Jewish community. You know, they say, 'What is your name? Do you have a place to eat tonight? Do you have someone to marry?' Very friendly. That notion of friendliness and loving, this is a Jewish idea they took from us. We gave away the business."

Jews for Jesus, founded in 1973 in San Francisco, is the most active among the Messianic Jewish missionary groups across the nation. The organization supports nine international branches—including two in the former Soviet Union—with an annual $16 million-dollar budget (mostly from private donations from the evangelical right).

Greg Zhelezny estimates that Hope of Israel, the Russian branch in Brooklyn, spends about $100,000 each year. Most of that money comes from the congregation's sponsor, New York's Redeemer Presbyterian Church. The money funds a rented office on Coney Island Avenue, bible study sessions in Russian, the rented church space in Sheepshead Bay on Saturday evenings and small perks like buffet suppers at their bible study sessions and donations of clothes, food and furniture for those settling into new homes.

But the bulk of the group's funding goes toward English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. Greg Zhelezny estimates that $50,000, or 50 percent of the group's annual spending, supports the biweekly classes. The classes are free but include a mandatory one-hour bible study session. Now, more than 200 Russian immigrants are learning English from the missionaries, and there is a waiting list of more than 400. "ESL is the number one enticement used by Jews for Jesus," says Craig Miller, director of the Jewish Action Group in Brooklyn. "The Jewish community has abilities, but not as many resources."

The $100,000 budget Hope of Israel depends on from Jews for Jesus is hardly being matched by Brooklyn synagogues. Miller blames hard times for a drop in donations from the Jewish community. But Rabbi Singer argues that the problem has deeper roots.

"The Jewish community, in general, has money," said Singer. "The problem is we invest so much into beautiful homes and trips to Florida, and our kids have no Jewish education. If I'm on the train and I see someone reading the Bible, I know that person is a Christian because the Jews are reading *The Wall Street Journal*."

At a Friday night American Messianic Jewish service in Manhattan, "Rabbi" Schiffman and members of the congregation expressed their concern for the branch across the bridge in Brooklyn. When Schiffman asked for needs and wishes to include in the group prayer, Renay, a plump woman wearing a charm necklace with a cross and a star of David, raised her hand. "Stan Telchin is arriving tomorrow to speak to the Russian Messianic congregation, and I know there are people planning to demonstrate against him," she said. "I want to pray for him and for that congregation, that they stand strong against the opposition."

On the cold, damp Saturday evening last January when Stan Telchin arrived, a police officer was addressing a handful of Jews for Jesus believers inside the church. The Russian service was to begin in about a half-hour. Mitch Glaser of Jews for Jesus warned journalists not to talk to any of "his" people. He explained, "These people have been living under oppression for seventy-five years and they trust us. If you go asking them questions you could scare them away." Outside, six young Orthodox Jews had found their familiar patch of grass in front of the church and stood ready. Blue police barricades contained the demonstrators inside a thirty-foot-long pen. Officer John Schmucker assured the missionaries: "I tell you, if people want to harass people coming in they don't have a leg to stand on."

Outside, the ten "troublemakers" felt flattered. "All this for us? Wow!" said Yossie Urabeck, whose bright eyes and patchy beard made him look even younger than his 20 years. This was the fifth week in a row the demonstrators had stood outside the church.

While Miller and the Jewish Action Group can organize alternatives for Russian Jews and demonstrate at public Jews for Jesus events, the Jewish community is more or less powerless against the Messianic Jewish movement's most powerful tool: the missionary.

With the help of a missionary, Vladimir Rogovoy found Jesus about five months after arriving in the U.S. from Kiev, Ukraine. He was waiting in line to register for freshman classes at Polytech University in Brooklyn. It had been a long day, and Vladimir recalled that everyone was feeling a little edgy. Then Vladimir noticed a cluster of people sitting on the floor around a tall young man with disheveled brown hair and dark brown eyes. His look was unkempt, but he spoke with vitality and kindness. Vladimir drew closer.

"He was speaking English, and it was sometimes hard to understand, but what I did understand touched me. I had seen a movie called *Jesus* in Russia, but this was the first time that the idea of God actually came to

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me," Vladimir recalled. He said he was so intrigued by Greg's preaching that he brought the young man home at the end of the day so that he could hear more. The two men from Kiev talked until midnight. They were both tired, especially Greg, who, Vladimir said, "looked practically dead." Vladimir invited Greg back to his home later that week for dinner, and the pair quickly became friends. Greg brought Vladimir a Bible to read, and they talked about their shared Jewish backgrounds and their shared faiths.

Seven months later, Greg invited Vladimir to his wedding, which was held not in anything like the bland "Houses of Marriage" Vladimir had known in the Ukraine, but in a church. Vladimir was dazed with wonder. "The ceremony brought me closer to the idea that you have to believe in something else in this world besides physical things," he said. "I had accepted it before, but this high level of spirituality at this wedding it ... I just felt something."

Today, thanks largely to Greg and his sister Nastya Zhelezny, Vladimir's life in his new homeland is rich. Before he met the Zheleznys, the slight, dark-eyed Ukrainian saw New York as a place of filthy streets and brusque people. "It was a shock," he remembered. "Before I came I had a different picture in my mind; I expected a great civilization, and that was certainly not what I saw." Now, as he sat beside Nastya, to whom he is engaged, with their matching pair of black-and-white cocker spaniels snoozing at their feet and a tray of hot tea steaming on a corner table, Vladimir concluded softly, "I came to this country looking for material treasures, and I ended up finding spiritual treasures instead."

Greg points to stories like Vladimir's to defend the missionary work he and the others do for Jews for Jesus. He argues that the group isn't trying to "steal" Jews from their religion, but offering Russian immigrants an element often missing from their lives: spirituality. Says Zhelezny: "If you go to Brighton Beach and you see what these people are interested in—diamonds, fur coats, Mercedes Benz—people come here because they want to be 'Americans' at all costs. It's a very unfortunate state to be in. So I think it's a very humane thing to reach out to these people and at least alert them to spiritual things."

As long as missionaries like Greg Zhelezny are avidly seeking to fill what they see as a tragic gap in Russian immigrants' lives, Russian Jews will be encouraged to shun tradition and join Messianic groups. And Rabbi Singer knows he has an uphill struggle in convincing Russians to learn more about traditional Jewish religion. "I'm reaching a lot of people," says Singer. "But the reality is that they're winning. We expect to lose about 8,000 Jews to missionaries in the U.S. this year. It's very serious."

It may sound strange to hear Singer speak about evangelical missionary groups in competitive terms, but the reality is many evangelical missionaries do feel that they are in a race. The year 2000 is significant for Christians who believe the turn of the century will beckon the second coming of Jesus Christ. Matthew 23:39 says, "Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." Many fundamentalist Christians take this passage to mean that everyone—especially Jews—must accept Christ as the Messiah before he will appear again. The push is on to convert as many Jews as possible in the next five years and, as Rabbi Singer jokes to traditional Jews, "Ladies and gentlemen, *you* are holding up the show." Evangelical Christians also point to references in the New Testament that single out Jews as a priority for missionaries, especially Romans 1:16, where Paul echoes the instructions of Jesus, saying, "Go to the Jew first and then to the Greek."

Such biblical passages make Messianic Jews like Greg Zhelezny feel that they are carrying out an urgent, sacred duty when they talk to a Jew about Jesus. Thirty-nine percent of respondents to a 1995 Gallup Poll identify themselves as evangelical, born-again Christians. If even a fraction of these people interpret the "instructions" of the New Testament as Zhelezny does, the drive to convert the Jews is clearly intense.

A large portion of Rabbi Singer's work lies in counseling those Jews who have already been converted to Christianity. His technique is to guide the converted Jew through the text of the Bible in intense study to disprove the Messianic Jewish claim that the Old Testament foreshadows the coming of Christ as the Messiah. He uses both texts of the Bible since, as he said, "that's the currency they're dealing in."

Isaiah 53 is the main text that Messianic Jews point to as proof that the Old Testament foretold the coming of Jesus as the Messiah. They say the passage describes the suffering and sacrifice of Christ. Miller and Singer argue that the figure in Isaiah 53 described as "stricken, smitten of God and afflicted" is not one man—Jesus—but an entire group of people—the Jews. Singer and Miller hold that when Vladimir Rogovoy or Greg Zhelezny read this text, they are reading not a justification for their acceptance of Christ, but for sticking with traditional Judaism even when it brings hardship.

"The Russian Jews could have given up their Jewish identity," said Miller. "They could have said, 'It's too tough being a Jew under communism. I don't want to put up with it.' They could have done that and instead they didn't. They lost jobs and privileges. Their lives were horrible. Why didn't they give up their Jewish identity? Why? The suffering servant is the answer. Jews have a special role, and this is what this passage is talking about."

Nastya Zhelezny and Vladimir Rogovoy only shake their heads at this argument. "We cannot stop being Jewish even if we believe in Jesus," Rogovoy said. "If we go back to Russia we will be just as persecuted whether or not we believe in Jesus." •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Damsels in Distress

Lionel Trilling might have been pleased with at least one aspect of **Sense and Sensibility** (Columbia). In his essay "Why We Read Jane Austen," he names her visual sense as one of her chief attributes, then says, "Notable among the elements of visuality . . . is that of *scale*, the relation in size between human beings and the components of their environment." Early in this film, soon after the death of his father, John Dashwood is riding in a carriage with his wife through the countryside, discussing the portion of his large inheritance that he ought to give to his stepmother and her daughters. (He had promised his dying father that he would help them.) Mrs. Dashwood keeps nipping at him to reduce the amount, and he is easy to convince. As his generosity shrinks, their mingy conversation is intercut with shots of the landscape they're traversing—pastoral, lovely, pure. The contrast dramatizes Trilling's view of scale. Every prospect pleases; only man and wife are vile.

The odd effect of this opening is charm. The sardonic point is certainly made, but the grace with which it is done, the chuckling justness of the perception, draw us into the film with added eagerness. No disappointments lie ahead. The director and the screenwriter truly understand the book's temper and tone. This fact is all the more gratifying considering who they are.

Ang Lee, the director, is Taiwanese, trained in theater and film in his own country and in New York. His best-known previous pictures are *The Wedding Banquet* and *Eat Drink Man Woman*, both of which are based in Taiwanese culture. Now here he is presumptuously understanding English culture at the end of the eighteenth century.

Scratch as hard as we like to disclose Asian influence in Lee's directing here, all we'll find is one more proof that a gifted director is something of an actor: with the right imagination, he can place himself at the center of perspectives far from his native ones. He can make his discoveries his domain. For instance, many of Lee's shots of interiors are framed by the doorways of the rooms in which people are sitting. This framing gently underscores that English age's passion for neatness, for containment—in furnishings, manners, outlook. Sometimes, with a tilt of the camera, he manages to suggest the serpentine wriggling of jealousies, in a sort of postscript to *The School for Scandal*. In any case, he shows both the sense and the sensibility of an artist.

Then there is the screenplay. More presumptuousness. Just because Emma Thompson has a degree in English from Cambridge, has co-written some of her theater and TV material, has proved in roles from Shakespeare through raunchy modern comedy that she is a magnificent acting talent, does that mean she has the right and ability to do a full-dress screenplay of a classic novel?

Headstrong as she is, she apparently didn't wait for an answer to that question: she simply plunged ahead. (The screenplay has just been published, along with Thompson's vivid, funny, gamy diaries of the shoot. Fifty photos, thirty-six in color. Newmarket Press, $23.95.) The result can easily be chided by maniacally zealous Austenites, but such folk probably should not go to films of Austen unless they want to sneer. Of course Thompson has condensed; inevitably she had to add a line here and there to accommodate an action; and she has altered very slightly. For instance, Lucy Steele, the young woman secretly engaged to Elinor Dashwood's beloved, is made somewhat less vulgar here. When Elinor learns the happy truth about Edward Ferrars, she does not hurry from the room to "burst into tears of joy," she does it immediately, right in front of him.

Such adjustments—there are others—can hardly be counted grave losses. What is lost, what must be lost in the filming of any good novel, let alone a great one, is the prose. We've been told by some that the current wave of Austen adaptations shows that we hunger for a cosmos secured by good manners. For me, this film adaptation makes the matter more complex, almost contradictory. Shorn of the prose that in some measure fulfills the novel's theme, the action alone of this *Sense and Sensibility* adaptation becomes a somewhat pitiless exposé of a cruel society: young women whose sole function is to find proper husbands; young men whose sole function is to inherit money or to marry it. Thus, rather than extolling the allegedly enviable assurances of the past, the film implicitly admires the present for being in great degree different.

Yet, once again with an important novel, if something is lost or skewed through film transmutation, something is gained if the film is good—as it resoundingly is

FILMS WORTH SEEING

The American President. *Two romances: a love affair in the White House and a steadfastly liberal president. Enjoyable. (Reviewed 12/18/95)* **Carrington.** *Bloomsbury "characters"—Dora Carrington (Emma Thompson) and Lytton Strachey (Jonathan Pryce)—in a somewhat cool but splendidly acted, intelligently written love story. (12/4/95)* **Get Shorty.** *Gangster comedy in Florida and L.A. Loose and generally lively. John Travolta is the mainstay. (11/13/95)* **Les Misérables.** *Jean-Paul Belmondo dynamic both as Jean Valjean and a modern analogue. The script unravels but is often moving. (11/20/95)*—**SK**

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here. First, the actors. Absolutely every role is cast with the hand of a Cellini setting gems in a design. Here I can tender only a few actors a grateful bow. Alan Rickman, from his very first utterance, endows Colonel Brandon with gravity and secrets. Gemma Jones, as the mother of the heroines, worries with touching reserve. Greg Wise, as the devious Willoughby, has the immediate appeal he needs to make him dangerous. Harriet Walter gives the scheming Fanny Dashwood the profile of maneuver. And, surprise of surprises, Hugh Grant makes no faces. He acts. He really creates the harried Edward Ferrars—hobbled just a bit because Grant is the only one in the cast who seems uneasy in costume.

Then there are the two "title" characters. Miss Sensibility—or, as we might say, sensitivity—is a relative newcomer, Kate Winslet. At first she seems just one more English rose; but very rapidly she whirls into impulse and vulnerability and romantic intoxication with heart-aching verity. A captivating performance.

Miss Sense is played by the screenwriter, E. Thompson (who spent five years working intermittently on the script while she acted in seven films). As it happens, just after I saw *Carrington*, in which she plumbed the eccentric love of an upper-class Bloomsbury artist, I saw a videotape of *Look Back in Anger*, made some years ago, in which she played Alison, drowning poignantly in dreariness. Now her Elinor Dashwood arrives. Thompson's power of inner transformation is so acute as to be almost uncanny. She had a particular problem here. She is 36 and can't look a great deal younger on the screen. Elinor is—not only in age—a quite young woman. To help Thompson, her mother, who is 40 in the novel, was cast older; so was her next-younger sister, Marianne, who is only 17 in the novel. Still, Thompson's role, as conceived by Austen, is of a woman some fifteen years younger than herself. What's extraordinary is how Thompson (certainly with Ang Lee's help, as the diaries make clear) evokes the youthfulness without a touch of the coy.

Again, as with *Carrington*, let's disregard those who start yipping "Masterpiece Theater" whenever they see a period film; and let's admire the wonderfully suitable work by the production designer, Luciana Arrighi, and the costume designers Jenny Beavan and John Bright, all of whom worked on *Howards End* as well as on numerous period and modern films, plays and operas.

Patrick Doyle, who composed the excellent scores for both of Kenneth Branagh's Shakespeare films, did the music for this picture, grounding himself affectingly in Mozart slow movements. The cinematographer was Michael Coulter, a master of (seeming) candlelight and lamplight.

A last bow to Lindsay Doran and her producing colleagues, who had the percipience to see in the director of *Eat Drink Man Woman* the director of *Sense and Sensibility*. •

Jed Perl on Art

Mystery Master

There's a strong theatrical undercurrent in the paintings of Johannes Vermeer. This seventeenth-century artist puts peace and quiet in italics with his supersubtle impressions of young women bathed in a blue-gray Northern light, and his very avoidance of movement and motive and any sort of dénouement creates its own kind of dramatic tingle, so that it's possible to feel as if we're eavesdropping on somebody's private life. Going through the retrospective at the National Gallery in Washington until February, we sometimes watch Vermeer's women from behind a curtain or find our view partly obscured by a rug that's heaped on a table. And even when these obviously proscenium-like elements are absent, Vermeer's corner-of-a-room settings have an uncanny combination of total credibility and total artifice that's familiar from the finest products of the naturalistic stage. While Rembrandt and Velázquez, who share this Baroque interest in theatrical convention, often permit their figures to look deep into our eyes, in Vermeer's case even the rare woman who's looking straight at us is generally also looking through us. It's the near-total self-absorption of these leading ladies that turns even our most casual encounter with a painting by Vermeer into an act of voyeuristic transgression.

Vermeer, who died in 1675 at the age of 43, went public with private experiences, and he did it with a daringly understated sneakiness that gives his solitary seventeenth-century moments their contemporary pop-icon status. His modern appeal isn't difficult to understand. Self-absorption is an all-too-familiar state, and it's quite natural that this painter who's gone as deep into the lights and shades of introspection as any artist provokes intense interest among a wide swath of the museumgoing public. People may run to see Rembrandt, another Dutchman who gets at what goes on inside a person's head, but the truth is that many museumgoers are uncomfortable with Rembrandt's rather extravagant painterly manner, because his impastoed surfaces contradict the naturalistic illusionism that photography has led them to expect from the visual arts. For half a century Vermeer has been the old master for the Kodak generation. Considering how he breaks up bits of light and dark into passages of intricate patterning, he may also turn out to be the old master for the digital generation.

Even if you've made your peace with the thought that this poet of uncrowdedness is being used to bring in the crowds, the Vermeer retrospective—billed as "the first exhibition ever devoted solely to [his] art"—is going to be a somewhat disquieting experience. There's a yin-and-yang tension to the blockbusting of Vermeer, because everybody is getting together to focus on aloneness, and this is hard to get used to, even though it's a paradox that probably has its origins around the turn of the century, when the modern passion for Vermeer arose at about the same time that social theorists were beginning to study the psychology of the crowd. I suspect that it's precisely because the organizers of this show recognize Vermeer's contemporary appeal that they've made so few concessions to popular taste, either in the darkly elegant installation or the scholarly tenor of the catalog. Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. of the National Gallery and Frederik J. Duparc, the director of the Mauritshuis in the Hague, where the show goes after Washington, may feel that Vermeer's relevance is best left to journalists. But there's something a bit strained about the carefully distanced tone of this retrospective, because, of course, its huge appeal is grounded in the sure knowledge that everybody believes that Vermeer is one of us.

The first work from Vermeer's maturity that visitors to the National Gallery encounter is the *View of Delft*, which hangs directly across from the entrance to the second room. This painting became a landmark of modern experience

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when Proust, in *Remembrance of Things Past,* wove it into his account of the death of the writer Bergotte, one of the very few people in his huge novel whose life represents a serious pursuit of the artistic vocation. Vermeer is a name that surfaces more than once in Proust's novel; Swann, who is also an admirer, writes an essay on the artist. Obviously, what Proust saw (and had his characters see) in Vermeer was the mysterious perfection of a naturalistic art, but after I'd been to the National Gallery retrospective I found myself thinking about Proust's Vermeer connection in a somewhat different way.

The *View of Delft* is an anomaly among Vermeer's works. It's larger than nearly all his other compositions, and it's closer to the norms of seventeenth-century Dutch painting. The way that Vermeer sets the city of Delft, where he lived and worked, in the middle ground, beyond a band of water, and uses a huge sky with ranks of light and dark clouds to give an expansive feeling, isn't all that different from the approach of landscape painters such as Ruisdael and Cuyp. It's the orderly coherence of Vermeer's overall presentation that underlines the anti-naturalistic naturalism of certain key details. The *View of Delft* is a prime example of Vermeer's use of full-tilt color to give the tonal mood of Dutch realism a startling personal slant. It's these unexpected passages of color in the painting—blue figures, pink earth, a yellow wall—that Bergotte read about in a review of a Parisian show of Dutch paintings. (The exhibition was based on a show that Proust actually visited in 1921.) And after reading the review Bergotte couldn't resist paying a return visit to a painting that he'd already admired in the Hague, even though he was now quite ill.

Bergotte ate a light meal and went off to the exhibition. After passing quickly through galleries full of paintings that didn't especially impress him, he came to the Vermeer. It was everything that he'd remembered and then some, and as he looked at it his attention began to fix on that "little patch of yellow wall" that was "like some priceless specimen of Chinese art." "That is how I ought to have written," he thought. "My last books are too dry, I ought to have gone over them with several coats of paint, made my language exquisite in itself, like this little patch of yellow wall." As Bergotte continued to look at the picture, he felt dizzier and dizzier, he knew that his strength was failing, and, conscious that he might even be dying, he thought to himself, "I have no wish to provide the 'feature' of this exhibition for the evening papers." In the next moments he sank down on a circular divan and rolled to the floor, "as visitors and attendants came hurrying to his assistance. He was dead."

Bergotte's end is generally read in an art-for-art's-sake spirit, as a death-and-transfiguration fable of the fin de siècle. Yet after a visit to the National Gallery show, this passage, in which the most private aesthetic revelation is juxtaposed with a bustling crowd scene and the rapacious curiosity of the press, takes on a somewhat different meaning. Bergotte's epiphany is given a darkly comic setting as Proust lays out the origins of the Master of Delft's paradoxical yet irreversible ascent to blockbuster status.

Nothing else in art even remotely resembles the glinting, shivering surfaces that Vermeer gives to all sorts of substances, from pottery and cloth to fur and flesh. That's what Bergotte admired most in Vermeer's work, and museumgoers who are naturally bewitched by his virtuosity are likely to believe that he can do just about anything. Yet in a sense there's very little that Vermeer knows how to do, beyond these almost hallucinatory naturalistic details. The work is a genius-level response to rather limited material.

Vermeer has no great ability to engage figures with one another dramatically, and he rarely uses gestures or facial expressions to convey an intensity of emotion. As a painter of cityscapes, his range is extremely, though fascinatingly, limited. And even in terms of what is obviously his greatest strength, the representation of domestic life, he gives us a particularly narrow view. It's possible to argue that De Hooch, who worked at the same time and dealt with much of the same domestic subject matter, has a deeper and more idiomatic feeling for what one assumes were the rhythms of Dutch life. Vermeer is so intent on turning ordinary events into peak experiences that it's sometimes almost a relief to turn to De Hooch, who refuses to give unprepossessing tasks and amusements such portentous treatment. De Hooch takes the importuning child and the mild flirtation in stride; Vermeer had eleven children, but the rambunctiousness of family life has left no trace in his aloofly informal paintings.

It's easy to see why Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. describes Vermeer as a classicist, but I think this distinguished student of seventeenth-century Dutch painting makes Vermeer look better-mannered than he really is when he argues that the artist's cool surfaces and interesting juxtapositions of vertical and horizontal elements imply a classical turn of mind. Wouldn't it be closer to the truth to say that Vermeer's flawless technique is especially designed for the microscopic examination of life's anarchic undercurrents? These paintings aren't demonstrations of general laws, they are dazzling records of mundane moments, and the placid surfaces only emphasize the wonderful oddity of the details to which Vermeer draws our attention. In the *Young Woman with a Water Pitcher,* the protagonist, with one hand wedded to the window and the other wedded to the pitcher, is trapped, held in a vise constructed of everyday domestic furnishings. Although logic tells us that in a minute the woman will move her arms, Vermeer insists on a striking although fleeting juxtaposition with such deliberate formal elegance that what is basically any old moment takes on the weight of an existential conundrum. There's an almost absurdist drama going on in *The Lacemaker,* where the blue cushion in the foreground has a more clearly defined personality than the woman bent over her work. Likewise, in Vermeer's rare exterior views, one can't help but wonder why he's so fixated on a particular doorway, a particular bit of brick. He's treating those details as if they're key pieces of evidence. But evidence of what? Couldn't a lot of other details tell us just as much?

The longer you look at Vermeer's paintings the stranger they become, because you begin to realize that he's only really clear about the confusing, elusive, evanescent things. In *A Lady Seated at the Virginal,* the fantastical patterns of *trompe l'oeil* marbleizing on the side of the elegant instrument are more lively, more animated, than the girl herself. Vermeer's women are too good to be true. You may find yourself wanting to sneak up on them, wanting to break through their glacial loveliness. In painting after painting your eye will go not to the expression on the face but to some striking detail like the glimmering highlight on a pearl earring. And in almost all the paintings you're far less likely to register a whole figure than a splash of light on an elbow or a few fingers. While Vermeer's dispassionate painterly gifts make it possible for him to bring his figures to life, the truth is that, judged by most standards, he's barely a passable draftsman. A lot of his figures are as immobile as dolls. Vermeer doesn't care how a hand connects to an arm, or an arm to a shoulder. Look, for instance, at the *Lady Writing a Letter with Her Maid.* The maid's right arm has no hand at all; it's just a lumpish appendage that runs straight into her left elbow. As for the left arm of the seated lady, it's more of an extension of

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the ink well than a limb related by an elbow to an upper arm and a torso. This isn't good drawing, but to call it bad drawing is of course to miss the point, because these absurdist arrangements, this anatomically incorrect body language, adds immeasurably to Vermeer's mysterious mood.

Vermeer's exact intentions remain deliciously unclear. After a century of archival research we still know painfully little about his training, his ideas, his patrons, his milieu. Christiaan Josi, a connoisseur who was active around 1800, speculated, it now seems incorrectly, that one of Vermeer's few paintings of a solitary man, *The Astronomer*, was a self-portrait. This painting, in the Louvre, has not come to the National Gallery, but the show does contain *The Geographer*, which was for a long time thought to be its pendant and obviously represents the same person. I suspect that part of the reason that the curators at the National Gallery have chosen this rare mature painting with a male protagonist for the cover of their catalog is because they mean to suggest, at least circumspectly, that the portrait of a geographer—of an intellectual—is in some way a spiritual self-portrait.

Like just about everything Vermeer ever did, however, *The Geographer* is surrounded by mysteries, speculations, uncertainties. It is now thought to be a portrait of Anthony van Leeuwenhoek, the microscopist, who is thought to have been a friend of Vermeer's, and with whom the artist could have shared interests in optics, in maps, in the science of perspective. Together with *The Astronomer*, *The Geographer* can be said to represent the man's-world side of the Vermeer universe. Bent over a table, with dividers, one of the tools of his trade, in one hand, the geographer turns to look out the window, obviously thinking about what he's just learned. Of course this moment of reflection that precedes or follows an act is by no means unique to Vermeer's paintings of men; the woman in the National Gallery's own *Lady Writing*, for example, is also pausing, in this case to consider what she's going to write next. The bending-from-the-waist poses of Vermeer's male figures do have a dynamic character that's somewhat unusual in his work, but then again these men are as tightly lashed to Vermeer's room-sized universe as are a lot of his women. The maps, the books, the globe that Vermeer has arranged around his geographer form the longitudes and latitudes—the points of the compass—of his mental life. There's a hedonism about the bookishness of this painting. The light coming through the window caresses maps and charts and leather-bound volumes; the glow gives the scientist's love objects a sensuous feel. This is a painting about the almost physical sense of well-being that comes with deep absorption in an intellectual quest.

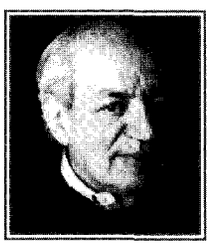
In Vermeer's day any sophisticated painter was expected to be familiar with an expanding body of knowledge about optics and perspective. While most of his contemporaries used this information to establish the shape of a normative world, Vermeer seems to have liked to obsess about the ins and outs of perception, so that in his paintings the mechanics of sight take on a fetishistic fascination. Many artists of Vermeer's time found a valuable aid to drawing in the camera obscura, a box with a lens at one end that projects the image at which it's pointed onto a transparent sheet for copying. Vermeer looked into the camera obscura and saw the same bizarre out-of-focus effects and startling jumps in scale that everyone else saw, but he alone enshrined that peculiar poetry. Although we have no records of Vermeer's thoughts about art, it's apparent that for him certain pieces of evidence gleaned from the camera obscura underscored an already strong feeling that all things are relative. This anti-idealist concept of sight would only become widely accepted in the nineteenth century, when the discovery by chemists of methods for fixing light images turned the camera obscura into a camera capable of taking photographs.

Because the photograph is now widely regarded as a standard of truth, there's a tendency to imagine that Vermeer's proto-photographic effects are a more accurate transposition of reality than the work of some of his contemporaries, such as Metsu and De Hooch, who favored a gently painterly treatment of naturalistic space. Yet it's well to remember that even photography only tells us a part of the truth; just think how disorganized the most pleasant interior can appear in a snapshot. When Vermeer gave the foreground of a painting an out-of-focus shimmer, he may have believed that he was capturing some essential optical fact. After all, he probably saw those blurred bits of thread in *The Lacemaker* when he looked at the scene in the camera obscura. But of course what Vermeer recorded in his paintings sometimes has nothing much to do with the way that the eye and the mind can together give fragmentary information a coherent form. For Vermeer, optics is an inward-turning, almost mystical science. It's obvious that he loves all those glinting, shimmering,

LEARNED HAND

THE MAN AND THE JUDGE

Gerald Gunther



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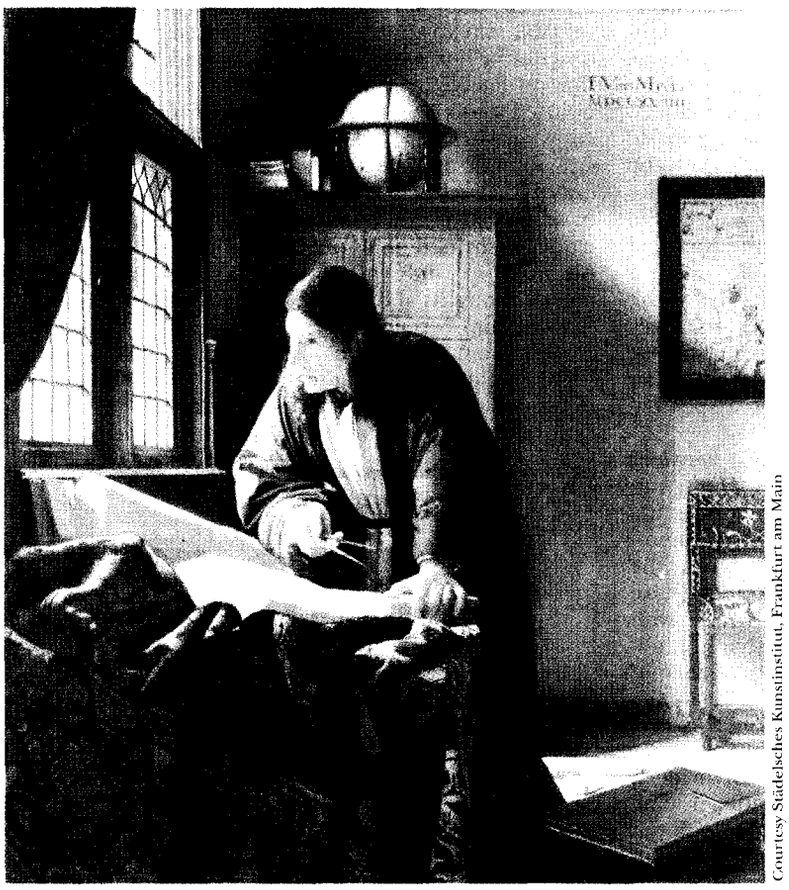
glowing, out-of-focus effects for their own sake, as poetic conceits. Vermeer lingers on interludes of vagueness: the rolled chart in *The Geographer*, which is so splashed with sunlight that it's just a barebones shape; the beads of light on the lion's head on the chair back in *The Girl with the Red Hat*. His paintings are masterpieces of circumstantial evidence, of partial disclosure.

Most of the canvases in the Vermeer retrospective were done over a period of fifteen years, between 1660 and 1675, and visitors may well feel a sharpening of the artist's always keen sense of control as they move from room to room. Relatively early works such as the *Woman with a Pearl Necklace* have a swimming chiaroscuro, and this permits the figures a certain quality of mobility. In later paintings, such as *A Lady Standing at the Virginal* and the *Lady Writing a Letter with Her Maid*, every inch of space is as deliberately designed as in the maps that sometimes hang on Vermeer's walls. These late paintings, although they have less of the illusionistic dazzle that the public adores, may be the fullest expressions of Vermeer's art. Here he neither confirms nor denies life's confusions, but trusts that we will recognize his icy elegance as an emotionally charged choice.

Scholars point out that in *A Lady Seated at the Virginal*, the painting-within-a-painting, Dirck van Baburen's ribald *The Procuress*, sets up a contrast between profane love and the ideal love suggested by the woman at the virginal, an instrument associated with the refinements of upper-class life. I suppose this is the case, but isn't Vermeer including a kind of good-and-evil division in order to slip right by it, to suggest that he's above this kind of moralizing? On the occasions when Vermeer is overtly symbolic, as in the late *Allegory of Faith*, he strikes a delicately ironic note. As Jean Louis Vaudoyer wrote in 1921 in the great essay on Vermeer that inspired the article that Proust has Bergotte read, the woman in the *Allegory of Faith* is treated as "an unexpected visitor, almost an intruder, who comes with her serpent and her chalice, her globe and her crystal ball."

Vermeer approaches standard seventeenth-century genre subjects, such as a woman writing or making lace or playing an instrument, with a mosaicist's interest in how the teeniest parts can be isolated and then fit back together; he atomizes genres. He seems to play his woman-in-an-interior game with magnificent disinterestedness. Yet, as we see how in each of his paintings the queen is cornered in some newer, more brilliant way, it becomes clear that Vermeer is the only player in the game and that he's making up the rules as he goes along. Over the years, various art historians have tried to demonstrate that some of Vermeer's paintings have rather overt erotic implications. But even where I can see iconographic connections to scenes of flirtation and seduction by other seventeenth-century artists, I find that whatever Vermeer borrows from contemporary sexual mores is completely dissolved in his personal poetic medium. He's a supremely solipsistic artist—I mean this as a compliment. Everything he knows is folded back into everything else he knows.



Courtesy Stadelsches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt am Main

JOHANNES VERMEER, *THE GEOGRAPHER*, c. 1668-1669

The organizers of the Vermeer show, who reportedly spent five years bringing together nearly two thirds of Vermeer's known output of thirty-five paintings, are certainly thoughtful individuals, but it's hard to see how they ever convinced themselves that all this complex planning could possibly coax these enigmatic paintings into the lucid presentation of artistic personality that is a retrospective's only justification. Scholars may benefit from the opportunity for close comparison that this gathering of paintings provides, but I don't think that the show enables museumgoers who are already somewhat familiar with Vermeer to feel all that much that they haven't felt before. That the late work is somewhat different from the earlier work is not news and does not justify the event. Vermeer's works are, one by one, so tightly focused and closely contained that it's well-nigh impossible for the organizers of a retrospective to reshuffle them or jog them into some new revelation. And it's not as if there are no risks involved. Museum people like to assure us that the international transport of rare works of art has been turned into an exact science. Yet even Duparc could not help but exclaim, at a press conference held to mark the opening of the show, that he had been "somewhat nervous" about sending Vermeer's *View of Delft* from the Hague to the United States.

There are strong arguments for leaving national treasures at home, and in any event it's not as if American museumgoers have no opportunities to see Vermeer. At least eleven of Vermeer's paintings are on permanent view in New York and Washington. I wonder how many of the people who are craning their necks to see the nine-inch-high *Girl with the Red Hat* have taken advantage of the fact that this dramatic little glimpse of flashing eyes and what I take to be late afternoon light normally hangs just a few galleries away. Displayed on some twenty walls in a series of five galleries, these masterworks don't fade, but they do lose a bit of their jarring, bizarre singularity. When people have asked me if the Vermeer show is a must-see, I've found myself telling them that it might be better not to fight the crowds, and to make plans to visit one or another of the paintings nine months from now in the museum whence it came. True, some of

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these paintings are in Europe, but London and Amsterdam aren't exactly out-of-the-way places, and only a handful of the pictures are especially hard or generally impossible to see. The three Vermeers that are in the Frick Collection in New York are on view there even now, for that museum has a strict no-loan policy. By next spring, each one of the Vermeers will be home again, looking as wonderfully solitary and wildly mysterious as the glistening jewel hanging from the left ear of the girl in the famous portrait in the Mauritshuis in the Hague. •

Vermeer in his time, and timeless.

Through A Glass Brightly

BY SIMON SCHAMA

Never confuse life with art, especially in Holland, where the temptation is strong. Visitors to the National Gallery's heart-stopping Vermeer show might suppose themselves transported to a bourgeois elysium: a brick-walled paradise of quotidian blessings, mantled in moist sunlight where gracefully costumed burghers perform delicate flirtation rituals beside heavy furniture and where the coarsest sound is the scratching of a goose quill: *luxe, calme, et volupté.* But Johannes Vermeer did not spend his days in a cube of light. For much of his life he occupied the back rooms of an inn on the market square of Delft, together with his wife Catharina Bolnes, her mother Maria Thins and (at least) eleven children, struggling to complete his annual quota of two paintings that would keep his many creditors at bay a little longer. When the art enthusiast Balthasar de Monconys visited Vermeer in 1663, hoping to see some of his work, he was sent to the local baker, to whom the artist had consigned work in exchange for bread. Having seen the picture, Monconys's only comment was that in his view the painting had been overpriced. And though Vermeer succeeded in banishing those eleven children, every one of them, from his painting, it's unlikely that their presence in his house made for an atmosphere of unruffled tranquility. The inventory of his possessions drawn up at his death in 1675 mentions chairs, cots and beds scattered randomly through the house—a picture by Jan Steen, not Johannes Vermeer.

If the atmosphere of gentle conviviality that drapes Vermeer's genre paintings was drawn from life, it was just as well, since the archives also speak of impoliteness. Vermeer's father, Reynier, originally a silk worker, had been arrested for knifing a soldier in a tavern brawl, but he went on to make enough money from art dealing to be able to buy the scene of the crime, the inn called "Mechelen." But Vermeer's in-laws, despite a substantial fortune made in brickworks and real estate, had their own share of aggravation. His mother-in-law, Maria, had suffered repeated violent assaults from her brutally abusive husband that led in the end to formal legal separation, an especially shocking trauma for a pious Catholic. And after Vermeer himself had converted to Catholicism and married Maria's daughter Catharina, their household was plagued by unwanted visits from her equally crazed and vicious brother Willem, whose idea of fun was to pull a knife on his pregnant sister.

None of this is to say we should now imagine Vermeer as a destitute bohemian. His wife's fortune and his own small art dealing business ensured that he could afford his studious pace of production, painting on commission rather than building an inventory for the market. And he was sufficiently well thought of, at least locally, to be elected headman of the artist's guild of St. Luke four times. Still, as Michael Montias, on whose pioneering archival research our historical understanding of Vermeer is based, points out, he owed this office less to any recognition of his pre-eminence than the dearth of alternative candidates. By the mid-1660s, when Vermeer was at the height of his powers, most painters with ambition and talent—Gerard Houckgeest, Pieter de Hooch, Christiaen van Couwenbergh and Emmanuel de Witte—had either already left town or would soon depart. Only Vermeer's old mentor, Leonart Bramer, hung on, surviving his protégé by three years.

Compared with the courtly elegance of the Hague, the roaring dynamism of Amsterdam or the precocious maritime hustle of Rotterdam, Delft was a half-ruined, snoozy backwater, forever trading on its associations with William the Silent, who had been shot at the Prinsenhof and buried in the Nieuwe Kerk. In 1654 the powder magazine of the arsenal of the States of Holland exploded, devastating much of the center and northeast of the town (which is one reason why Vermeer's *View of Delft* is painted from the south), killing, among scores of citizens, the painter generally recognized as Delft's best claim to genius, Carel Fabritius. Only partially recovered from the calamity, Delft was turning into a one-business town (pots, of course) with small-time remnants of its old industries, brewing and tapestry; a place with no theater, little music, a stuffy Calvinist patriciate that still obliged Catholics such as Vermeer and his family to worship in hidden chapels shoe-horned into the cramped "Papist's Corner."

But we don't go to Vermeer for illustrated social history. And though, thanks to Montias, we know a great deal more about his milieu, the personality of the artist remains in deep shadow. Much of the documentation concerns debts, marriage contracts and notarized acts of witness; and in his essay for the exhibition catalog Ben Broos must perform miracles of syllogism to make decisive connections between Vermeer and important cultural contemporaries such as Constantijn Huygens (involving, for example, a virginal-maker they may have had in common). A single fascinating document survives in which the artist ventures an expert judgment in a dispute between the dealer Gerrit van Uylenburgh and his customer the Elector of Brunswick as to the quality of a consignment of paintings. Vermeer wrote them off as rubbish, doubtless helping to sink Uylenburgh's already foundering fortunes.

For the most part, though, Vermeer is unavailable for comment, missing from the scene, not least in his own paintings. Countless other Dutch masters—including some whom Vermeer knew, such as Gerard ter Borch, Carel Fabritius, not to mention Fabritius's teacher Rembrandt, Gerard Dou, Jan Steen and the "fine painter" Frans van Mieris the Elder, who got himself up in garishly loud gold satin

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to eyeball the impressed viewer—were eager to offer self-portraits, often in the act of painting. Vermeer, by contrast, was almost perversely self-effacing.

In two of the most sophisticated statements about their practice, Rembrandt (in his deceptively unpretentious little panel of 1629 in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts) and Velázquez (in *Las Meninas*) are both at pains to display the mediating countenance of the creative artist while turning the back of the easel to the beholder. In the great *Art of Painting* (sadly missing from this show, though with so many masterpieces complaints seem churlish), Vermeer reverses these visual priorities. His subject—the Fame of Netherlandish painting, allegorically personified in the figure of Clio with a trumpet and book and reinforced by Nicholas Visscher's map of the seventeen provinces of the old united Netherlands—is unequivocally proclaimed, while the painter gives us only his back. In one of the show's most elaborate stunners, *The Music Lesson* from Buckingham Palace, Vermeer gives the coyest possible indication of his controlling presence in the scene by a mirror reflection of the legs of his easel. Tucked into the tiny patch of canvas behind the much more prominent reflection of the head of the keyboard player, the gesture is eloquently furtive.

This obstinate refusal of self-presentation, so rare in Dutch painting, is one of Vermeer's greatest gifts to his devotees, for it forces us back to the act of painting itself. It also inconveniently sets obstacles in the way of almost any and every approach conventionally offered by art history. It's hard to think of another master whose poetic self-containment makes virtually any commentary prosaically superfluous. Context? Who needs it. Formal analysis? Oh, the orthogonals go thataway. I see. Iconography? The snake means Heresy? You don't say! X-radiography? The blue skirt was originally a tad bigger at the back. Wow.

Not that Vermeer's calculated obliqueness has deterred a long line of interpreters from offering their respective versions of his uniqueness, often presented as a decoding of visual crypt, whether in mechanical-optical mode (arcane disquisitions on the camera obscura) or the transcendentally enigmatic mode (arcane disquisitions on the Jesuits). Perhaps it's symptomatic that much of the most persuasive writing on Vermeer has been done either by painters relatively unencumbered by the obligations of interpretations, such as Lawrence Gowing, or by technical analysts such as Arthur Wheelock Jr., one of the two curators of this exhibition, whose *Vermeer and the Art of Painting* is incomparably the best account of the artist's working practices, in particular the elaborate layering of pigments and glazes that gives Vermeer's "color drawing" its distinctive luster and freshness.

Courtesy Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

JOHANNES VERMEER, *THE LITTLE STREET*, c. 1657-1658

Anyone sharing my own allergy to flat-footed prose-renderings of Vermeer will be grateful for the simplicity and the economy of the National Gallery's installation. Wall-caption overkill designed to stun the beholder with curatorial erudition is mercifully absent here, though anyone wanting complete information on Vermeer's career and reputation, as well as thoughtfully presented technical and scientific information, will find it all in a separate room halfway through the show. Given all the things that could go wrong, the design and the lighting of the galleries by Mark Leithauser and Gaillard Ravenel is a model of restraint, the only jarring note being the noisily worked late-seventeenth-century frame in which the Louvre has imprisoned *The Lacemaker*, so that one has to fight one's way through the floral marquetry to get inside Vermeer's tightly organized little space. But given the curatorial wonders wrought by Frederik Duparc, the Director of the Mauritshuis and Arthur Wheelock Jr. in coaxing fragile, precious masterpieces out of understandably apprehensive lending institutions, it's probably too much to ask them to rip it from its frame.

Everything else is perfection, fitting enough for a painter for whom nothing less would do. We are so accustomed to seeing Vermeer's little jewels emitting their pulses of intense light from a corner of a museum gallery crowded with works deemed related—De Hooch, Metsu, Netscher, ter Borch—that the experience of encountering nothing but Vermeers induces a kind of kinetic power surge in our optical equipment. And it reinforces the impression that, while any number of Dutch masters excelled in creating painterly light on the canvas, only Rembrandt and Vermeer managed to reproduce the precise sensation of drenching illumination. But Rembrandt offers illuminated action, while Vermeer's illumination *is* the action. Delft's one remaining distinctive cultural specialty was optics; and Vermeer's light is the closest thing we have to a transcription of seventeenth-century optical theory that imagined light not as a passive property but an active force traveling in rays from luminous surfaces toward the organizing intelligence of the eye.

What is it, though, that traps us all in a state of dumb rapture before the greatest of Vermeer's works? The bath of light, now lustrously blue, now intensely gold, that washes over his figures? Yes and no. Although the freshness and the truth of

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that light ought to make everything within Vermeer's pictures exquisitely lucid, the cunning of his art is that it does not. The brilliant scintilla glittering from the edge of the great black boat moored on the river Schie below the walls of Delft ought to correspond to the diffused highlights said to be seen in a camera obscura image of the scene. Naturalistically, though, the boat is in shadow precluding those granular highlights, and Vermeer, whose own intelligence never condescends to the beholder, means us to notice this, just as he means us to notice that the ultramarine woman reading her letter in the pouring light, like a witch, casts no shadow at all. As the gallery guard with whom I stood in front of *The Music Lesson* observed, the mirror on the wall above the virginals casts an unfaithful reflection of its player's head, displaying more of her features than should be possible given its angle of inclination, straight down toward the keyboard.

It's a commonplace now to insist that Vermeer was a self-conscious magician, a light-show specialist, who, however knowledgeable and respectful of the laws of optics, was perfectly prepared to bend its rays for his aesthetic and psychological manipulations. His paradoxical achievement was to make some of his most numinous light-effects melt the linear edges of the material world into an atmospheric vision entirely of his own creation. In this sense, what casually appears to us as a superreal brightness serves to veil, rather than to expose, the empirical measure of people and things. All those maps are not the key to Vermeer's conception of visualizing the material world; they are the flat, diagrammatic challenge to his powers of invention. So we look at a string of pearls, a ceramic water-pitcher, a bead of moisture lingering on the inside of a rosy lip, and we see these things through a glass brightly, but they are all no less unattainable for their apparent clarity. Vermeer teases us, sometimes mercilessly, with the unbridgeable distance between vision and possession; with the fugitive, disobedient quality of visual memory; things caught in a burst of dazzling illumination and then lost again to the heedless impatience of time. That's why he caught Proust's eye and why he cuts us to the quick.

Vermeer's pronounced aversion to crisp linearity was there, virtually from the beginning. His beautiful *Diana and Her Companions*, from around 1655, already violated most of the conventions expected of aspiring history painters. Stylistically and thematically, the painting is willfully indeterminate in a genre where precise contouring and intelligible classical allusion and narrative were condi-

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tions of success. Vermeer's peachy maiden, robed in Correggio gold, the sleeves of her chemise rolled up, is only formulaically identifiable as Diana by the half-moon tiara. But the composition is imprecisely located; no peeping Actaeon; no presumptuously pregnant Callisto. Instead Vermeer seems to have imported the detail of a servant washing Diana's feet directly from Rembrandt's *Bathsheba* of 1654, smoothly and expediently transferring the theme of illicit voyeurism from one story to another.

Jacob van Loo's equally imprecise scene of Diana and attendant nymphs is usually cited as a precedent, but Vermeer's mood-music has absolutely nothing in common with van Loo's hard, pert creature staring directly at us. Van Loo lights his coquette (perhaps a "historiated portrait" of a sitter) to flatter her face and the conventionally exposed huntress-breast. Vermeer characteristically has light fall over her neck, shoulder and creamy half-moon breasts, while leaving her face illegibly shrouded in shadow. Allegorical details such as the dog and thistle (faithfulness and sorrow) are treated even more sketchily, while the golden water basin is presented at an impossible angle to allow Vermeer a passage of bravura still-life illusionism. As a showcase for a young classicist the painting is wonderfully wrong, invoking Titian's manner at its smokiest, gathering its graces, one of them African, about a pinwheel of delicate movement that suggests the wistful Italianate love ballads popular in Amsterdam (but not in Delft): the truisms of proper history painting surrendering to lyric refrain.

A few years later Vermeer seems to have given up on history painting altogether, but with *The Little Street* he was not exactly doing a routine townscape either. It's that diminutive *straatje,* the relatively modest format and what was, for the most part, an accurate rendering of the houses along the Voldersgracht that Vermeer would have seen from his window, that has led to this tour de force being treated as an unassuming prelude to the more rhetorically spectacular *View of Delft.* Certainly the ostensible subject is the kind of thing done more simply and repeatedly by Pieter de Hooch and the mysterious Jacobus Vrel. In the guise of a slice of street-life, however, Vermeer has launched into an experiment in spatial ordering that is proto-abstract in its daring.

His starting point is the longitudinal division of the picture space at a little less than a third of its depth. The line marked by the façade of the house with its architecturally eccentric central arched mullion window and irregularly whitewashed walls continuing to the blue-shuttered house abruptly cropped at the left constitutes, in effect, a second picture plane, parallel to the original. And it is this second plane, screening off deep space, which Vermeer then pierces with recessions and apertures of irregular depth, or to which he attaches shallow projections like the benches, or, most sweetly, the broad, yellow-skirted rear end of a girl playing knuckle bones on the checkered street. The astonishing, contrapuntal rhythm of all these openings and shuttings, enriched with precisely calibrated color alternations on the shutters, are what give the picture (as distinct from the scene) its chattering energy.

For what this painting is *not* is "quiet." It hopscotches its way back and forth along the aggressively marked line of perspective, the busy movement kept in order by the strong, solid diagonals of the gabled roofline at the left. Working in visually neat rhyming couplets, the painting pairs windows, doors, children, the two maids standing and sitting; the latter's face somehow conveying concentration on needlework despite being scarcely more than a casual dab of pink paint. But the most elaborately paradoxical of these twinned images matches the black arched door at left center with the next door view through to a servant at a water barrel. For the ostensibly shut black arch is carefully painted to imply an opening, while the view into the little passage seems oddly flat, discontinuous with the foreground and even opaquely mirrored. In other words, this seems a lot more like Mondrian's territory than Pieter de Hooch's. Like the explicitly abstract master, Vermeer was aiming for timelessness—all the more urgent since this entire row of houses was scheduled for demolition and did indeed fall to the wreckers after the explosion in 1654.

Courtesy Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie

JOHANNES VERMEER, *WOMAN WITH A PEARL NECKLACE*, c. 1664

Likewise, the *View of Delft* that won the awe-struck admiration of such nineteenth-century critics as Theophile Thoré for its presentation of a civic world apparently impervious to upheaval, swaddled in serenity, is better understood as a response to the reverberations of Delft's famous calamity: the dull blast, the shattering of glass and splintering of timber repaired more effectively on this canvas than in the rubble-strewn streets. Vermeer's answer to smoke and ruin (painted in a documentary spirit by Egbert van der Poel and Daniel Vosmaer) was a resurrection piece, an act of faith that sprang naturally from his Catholic piety. The time is morning; the moment of another day's redemption. Sunlight streams from the east to part clouds formed like the wings of a dark angel, or rhetorically drawn back (as in other Vermeer paintings) like a heavy curtain, to reveal the inner sanctum of the town, the spire of the Nieuwe Kerk, the resting place of the martyred William, concentrating the most intense radiance. Dirck

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van Bleyswijck's eulogy to the city that included a poem by Arnout Bon lamenting the death of Fabritius but praising Vermeer as his true successor was published a few years after this painting; but the image of the Phoenix arisen, like other holy miracles, from the pyre, was already a commonplace.

Deceptively uncluttered, Vermeer's painting is in fact dense with allusion and quotation, not least to the epitome of topographical paintings of stoutly walled and simply rendered Dutch cities, Esaias van de Velde's wonderful *View of Zierikzee*, done in 1617, from which Vermeer surely took the *repoussoir* of the sandy riverbank. But there were also examples closer to home—Hendrik Vroom's early view of a simpler Delft, the site of princely martyrdom and many more sophisticated versions of citadels of liberty seen across bodies of projecting water like the Valkhof at Nijmegen painted many times by the likes of Jan van Goyen and Aelbert Cuyp. Vermeer's aim must have been to invoke and to surpass all these precedents by a virtuoso display of every imaginable painterly skill.

The texture of the red-tiled roofs at left, for example, was made more dense by mixing sand into the pigment, almost as if Vermeer was as much rebuilder as image-maker. The same perspectival drive at work in *The Little Street* is deployed here to more theatrical effect, pulling the sight-line through the apertures of the Schiedam and Rotterdam gates, over the bridge into the sunlit heart of the inner town, its detail shielded by the protecting walls. And although it seems likely that Vermeer did set up a camera obscura in a house across the Schie, his selective transfer of its image does not suggest, as Daniel Arasse has argued in *Vermeer: Faith in Painting* (Princeton University Press), the most compelling of recent Vermeer studies, an artist slavishly obedient to device. Just the reverse, in fact. While the lens-focused image projected onto a wall of a darkened room from a small hole was greeted by painters such as Samuel van Hoogstraten as the objective transference of natural truth, Vermeer's willfully inappropriate rendering of its highlights suggests an unrepentant retort to all those who believed the magic image would make the painter's craft redundant.

Producing an illusion of the shining surfaces of things, after all, was barely half of Vermeer's work. Invariably, his most astonishing paintings report the negotiation between visible and invisible worlds; between the immediacy of sensations and their contemplative, interior echo. It is in this sense that our understanding of the word "reflection" as simultaneously an effect of light and an effect of thought seems an apt characterization for Vermeer's deepest preoccupations. Oddly enough, the one genuinely gifted painter who arrived in Delft after most others had left, the still-life artist Abraham van Beyeren, was himself interested in reflection-play, and on occasions would offer fugitive images of himself, or the cross-pattern of a window frame reflected in a wine glass or silver bowl.

The conventional pieties of *vanitas* symbolism were too hackneyed to be of much interest to Vermeer. Even his Jesuitically theatrical *Allegory of Faith* is saved from being a mere inventory of devotional emblems by the typically oblique gesture of replacing the standard reflection of a cross in the crystal orb with an impression of the interior working space of his own studio, lit as always from the left: icons of painting and religion neatly dissolved into each other. For the works which most directly engage with Vermeer's great issue of the mystical marriage of the material and spiritual—the Berlin *Woman with a Pearl Necklace* and the National Gallery's own *A Woman Holding a Balance*—Vermeer employs purely painterly indicators of the fluctuating relationship between seen and unseen matters. In the Berlin painting, Vermeer painted out a map that he had originally meant to place between the profile of a girl, dressed in ermine-trimmed primrose-dyed satin, toying with her pearls like a rosary and the twinned glasses of mirror and window, and instead allowed a broad expanse of whitewashed wall to hold the balance between vanity and innocence. That airy emptiness, bloated with golden light, is proclaimed to be the core of the painting through the dramatic contrast with its chromatic opposite: the heaped mass of black cloth threatening to overrun the entire lower half of the painting were it not for a little aperture of light opened at the base that reassuringly silhouettes a table leg.

That dark zone functions as a formidable barrier between the beholder and the ostensible subject of the painting, and many of the most powerful works in the show cast their spell by appearing to proffer something irresistible (a jewel, a tune, a face, the heart of a city) only to put it out of reach, insisting on confinement within the realm of painting. *The Music Lesson* virtually barricades its protagonists behind a succession of impedimenta—the great baroque seep of the Turkish table rug, made to appear even more grandiose by Vermeer's eccentrically low point of view; the chair with its studs all picked out with pimples of brilliant reflection; the bass viol and the

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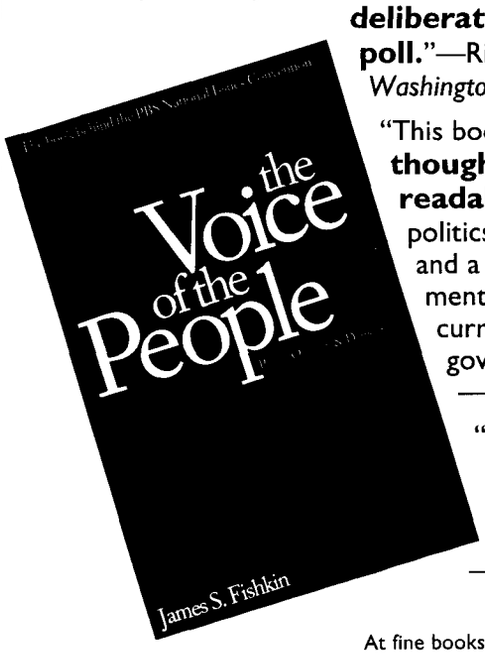

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gleaming ceramic water jug—all interposing themselves between us and the figures, connected along their musical axis. It's as though we have to cup our hand to our ear to hear the *Musica laetitia comes medicina dolorum,* the "companion of love and balm for pain" inscribed on the instrument's lid. But the orchestration of patterned rectangles playing through the composition in time with the virginals establishes, in addition to the two spaces of foreground and background figures, the additional notational space of the painter's invention, revealed in the mirror, and thus, in actual terms, *in front* of the scene we are witnessing.

In the most tantalizing of all his works, the one still called *Girl with a Pearl Earring* even though cleaning has revealed an underside reflection of a tear-shaped ornament too massive and silvery to have been grown in any known oyster, Vermeer mobilizes all his skills to probe the relationship between innocence and desire. Be advised that the result bears no relationship to any impression gleaned from printed reproductions, however seductive, and is likely to make strong persons buckle at the knees and reach for a glass of water.

Bought for the princely sum of two guilders in the nineteenth century, the painting predictably became known as "the Dutch Mona Lisa." Both heads achieve a timelessness that the term "portrait" inadequately describes, but a better comparison would be with Rembrandt's portrait of Jan Six, which is to say, the greatest portrait in the history of Western painting. Both use a black ground, especially uncharacteristic for Vermeer, densely worked, so that the brilliant colors required to advance from an indeterminate, suggestively infinite space can be precisely calibrated for maximum vitality and projection. In Rembrandt's figure, it is the dazzling scarlet cape that does the work of "introduction" between artist and beholder. Vermeer opts for the stunning headdress in blue and gold, wrapped and gathered like no known Dutch costume but which soaks up gentle, sumptuous light. In both cases, the precisely established relationship between brilliantly lit figure and obscure ground succeed in giving their subject stillness *and* animation.

In Vermeer's miraculous confection, the light, originating who knows where, fills the opal face, itself an enlarged echo of the jewel, and shines from reflections standing at the edge of the hazel iris, executed by Vermeer with a single stroke of lead white continuing from the surface of the cornea to the edge of the dilated pupils. Exactly modeled through the gentlest shadowing on the right side of the forehead, nose and jaw, this face manages to keep a perfect proportion while somehow conveying the distinct possibility that at any minute it might retreat and dissolve once more into black invisibility. Paradoxically, the craquelure that now covers its surface like the most delicate porcelain only intensifies the strange urgency with which the image asks to be registered. Only Vermeer could have managed to paint moistly parted lips that suggest at the same time greeting, expectation, consummation and valediction.

For all his unparalleled skill in registering the sharp poignancy of things lit, seen and then relinquished back to the darkness, Vermeer's art, unlike Rembrandt's, is not, in essence, tragic. In its way, though, it is heroic in its triumphant celebration of small pleasures intensely felt. Through the moments of lovelorn letter-writing and dreamy gazes caught in the whisper of a smile there runs a note of controlled exhilaration that Vermeer allows to blaze away in the sheer intensity of his color: the shimmering lead-tin yellow, the precious ultramarine usually reserved for saints and deities.

Standing in one of the exhibition rooms, between two such intense points of radiance as *Woman with a Pearl Necklace* and *Woman in Blue Reading a Letter* uncannily reproduces the sensation of being caught in one of Vermeer's magic light boxes, with mirror images and paired paintings softly addressing each other across a lit space. It's hard to think of any exhibition of twenty-one paintings more potent in its capacity to pull the beholder inside their world, to flood us with a trance-like elation at the illuminated fabric of our lives. This high aesthetic voltage may not be enough, perhaps, to light the National Gallery during past and future shutdowns, but it's more than enough to turn wintry discontents into brilliant spring.

SIMON SCHAMA is the author most recently of *Landscape and Memory* (Knopf).

Piety and Plenty

BY JACKSON LEARS

Christmas in America: A History by Penne L. Restad

(Oxford University Press, 219 pp., $25)

Consumer Rites: The Buying and Selling of American Holidays by Leigh Eric Schmidt

(Princeton University Press, 363 pp., $24.95)

In large doses, the American Christmas really is a little hard to swallow. For some palates, the gooey mass of kitsch, gumming together everyone from Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer to Amahl and the Night Visitors, seems merely to sweeten Christian hypocrisy in the service of cash. No wonder sensitive souls, from fervent believers to militant atheists, have found the confection indigestible.

Of course there are variations in this ecumenical revulsion. Christians may employ a rhetoric of authenticity and decline, and lament the passing of a purer Christmas past. Those outside the Christian tradition are more likely to experience the American yuletide as alien, threatening and even contemptible. Consider Alexander Portnoy, telling about his recoil from the gentile neighborhoods at Christmas:

> Not only is there a tree conspicuously ablaze in every parlor, but the houses themselves are outlined with colored bulbs advertising Christianity, and phonographs are pumping "Silent Night" out into the street as though—as though?—it were the national anthem, and on the snowy lawns are set out little cut-out models of the scene in the manger—really, it's enough to make you sick. How can they possibly *believe* this shit? Not just children but grown-ups too, stand around on the snowy lawns smiling down at pieces of wood six inches high, that are called Mary and Joseph and little Jesus—and the little cut-out cows and horses are smiling too! God! The idiocy of the Jews all year long, and then the idiocy of the goyim on these holidays! What a country! Is it any wonder we're all of us half nuts?

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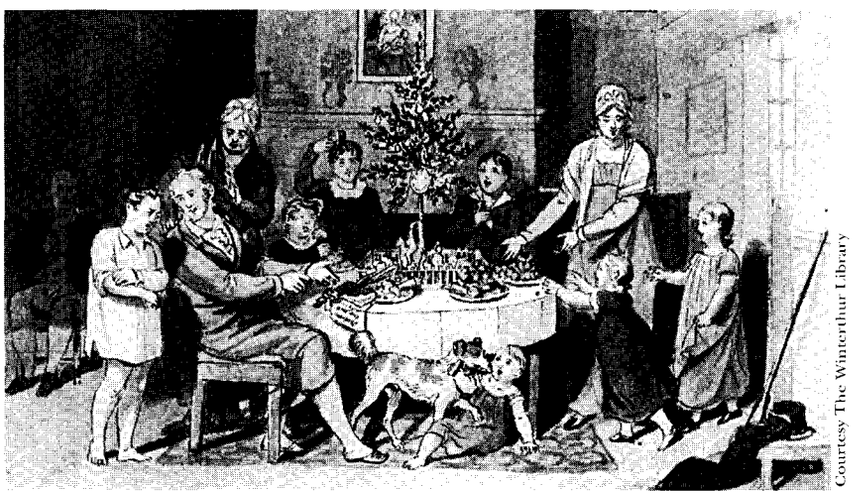
In part, this outburst by Philip Roth's notorious protagonist is an understandable Jewish response to the semi-official Christianity of a season in which "Silent Night" might as well be the national anthem. But Portnoy's complaint stems less from his Jewish upbringing than from his adult identity as a secular, left-liberal managerial professional, a man who despises talk of God in any idiom. He rails as often against Yahweh as against Jesus, and finds the Jewish dietary laws as revolting as Nativity scenes. He is, in short, a strong if cartoonish representative of the enlightened intelligentsia of the century.

And his attitude toward Christmas is typical of the liberal intellectual tradition. For decades, Christmas has at best inspired benign neglect among critics and historians of American culture. The relentless secularism of academic culture is partly to blame, but so is the utilitarian cast of American social thought and the ascetic criticism of "materialism" at the heart of our moral philosophy. These tendencies all came together in the enormously influential Thorstein Veblen, who did more than any other American thinker to shape educated Americans' understanding of their encounter with material things. Veblen lumped "conspicuous consumption" with sports and games, "devout observances" and aesthetic display. They were all reducible, he insisted, to "pecuniary emulation," his characteristically inflated term for status striving. Veblen fancied himself a socialist and disdained superstition as a survival of primitive animism; and he looked forward to the day when "the discipline of the machine" would promote rationality among the entire population. One can only imagine his howls of derision at the modern American Christmas.

In recent years, however, historians and critics have begun to emerge from Veblen's shadow. They have begun to write the anthropology and the history of the festival. Intoxicated by heady draughts of Mikhail Bakhtin, they have discovered the "subversive" elements of pageantry and ritual. (The discovery of subversion has become as popular as it was in the McCarthy era, only now the moral connotations have been reversed.) With only a few exceptions, their focus has been working-class and political rather than middle-class and religious: the people out of doors and the lusty leather-apron crowd, rather than the Victorian family clustered around the Christmas tree in their parlor. This should come as no surprise. What, after all, could be more redolent of those dreaded "family values" than the sentimental, middle-class holiday of Christmas? The question, and the assumptions behind the question, suggest more about contemporary ideological reflexes than about the history and the culture of Christmas.

But here are two books which suggest the beginnings of a nuanced perspective on Christmas in American culture. Leigh Schmidt's book is the more systematic and scholarly, the more conceptually sophisticated, the more widely ranging; he treats Valentine's Day, Easter and Mother's Day as well as Christmas, all within a delicately balanced framework of tensions between market rationality and romantic sentiment. He knows it is impossible to take festivals seriously from a Veblenesque perspective, since "festive behavior is built in large part on wastrel prodigality, on surplus and abundance, on conspicuous consumption." Penne Restad is less theoretically explicit, but she knows enough anthropology to have a subtle understanding of how rituals work, enough cultural history to know that "time-honored traditions" can be invented overnight, enough diaries, letters and manuscripts to have a lot of good stories to tell. Both writers sometimes let the religious dimensions of their subject slip away entirely; but this, too, is in the Christmas tradition.

Still, these books are fresh and timely alternatives to contemporary academic fashion. Schmidt proclaims himself a defender of the despised Protestant bourgeoisie, and his words could characterize Restad's work as well. The American appropriation of Bakhtin, he writes, "all too easily mires middle class folks and their rites in a one-dimensional netherworld. Repressed, neurasthenic, even hysterical, the bourgeois are left holding the dim candles of the carnivalesque, terrified by a shadow circus of released inhibitions and enclosed in a cluttered interior of kitsch with a host of tepid domestic rituals to perform. I have tried to accord the same respect to these feminized, commodified, middle-class forms of piety and celebration as is so readily accorded the topsy-turvy world of carnival." This evenhanded approach allows both writers to avoid the easy equation of embourgeoisement with decline, to grant the private, domestic household its dignity and its complexity, and generally to explore the wide range of meanings that have been attached to Christmas over several centuries.



Courtesy The Winterthur Library

A FAMILY AT CHRISTMAS, FROM THE SKETCHBOOK OF LEWIS KRIMMEL, c. 1810

The origins of Christmas lie in the syncretist cunning of early Christianity. By the second century the Romans were regularly feasting, drinking and cavorting like satyrs from December 17, the first day of Saturnalia, to Kalends, January 1. Devotees of Mithras set the feast of the Invincible Sun on December 25, the winter solstice on the Julian calendar. In the fourth century, Christians began to celebrate the Feast of the Nativity on December 25, partly to pose a challenge to the pagan cults, partly to head off the Arian heretics (who claimed that Jesus was merely a human agent of God) by assigning Jesus one undeniably human quality: a birthday. But gradually the significance of the date became more than Machiavellian. Christmas came to embody the theology of the incarnation, which merged human flesh and divine spirit in the figure of Jesus; it preached the resurrection of the body as well as the soul. What more appropriate time to celebrate this regenerative vision than the short dark days from Saturnalia to Kalends, when Romans decorated their houses with evergreen boughs to pay homage to the inexhaustible fecundity of the natural world?

Incarnational theology, however unsystematic and diffuse, lay at the heart of Christian expansion. As Restad writes,

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in somewhat anachronistic, therapeutic language, "the Church layered profane activities with sacred ends to answer the needs, spiritual and physical, of the total person." Ecclesiastical leaders were never entirely comfortable with this marriage of sacred and profane; medieval moralists fretted over the persistence of pagan pleasures, drawing sharp boundaries between "the time of business" and "the time of salvation." But the people at large continued to play whenever they had the chance, merging religious festivities with the fleshly excess of carnival, and later with the great commercial fairs that brought exotic consumer goods to early modern Europe. Christmas was part of the liturgical cycle, the dramatic framework that created a life lived on multiple but overlapping planes of meaning. In that life, matter and spirit were hopelessly muddled; the humblest artifact could bear the most exalted meaning.

The Reformation brought sweeping but uneven changes. Calvinist reformers aimed to clarify the medieval muddle, to live life in accordance with a unified spiritual discipline: Christmas was a work day like any other, only the Sabbath was holy. Anglicans and Roman Catholics clung to the old calendar. The conflict between Anglican and Puritan shaped the early American Christmas. On December 25, 1621, at Plymouth, Massachusetts, several "lusty yonge" Englishmen told Governor William Bradford that "it wente against their consciences to work on that day." Bradford said he "would spare them till they were better informed;" but when he discovered them bowling in the street, he sent them indoors, outraged that they should play while others worked. Farther south, the Virginia Anglicans were stuffing themselves on Christmas Day with "plentie of good Oysters, Fish, Flesh, Wild-foule, and good bread," as John Smith reported in 1608. And Catholics bound for Maryland aboard the *Ark* in 1633 drank so much wine on Christmas that "the next day 30 sickened of feve[r]s and wherof about a dozen died afterward." The contrast between prodigal Southerners and censorious New Englanders would persist at least until the Civil War.

There were many strange local variations on carnival traditions. Some may have been more African than European. In Wilmington, North Carolina, from the start of the nineteenth century if not earlier, small bands of slaves known as John Cooners paraded about the city, dressed in ribbons, rags, feathers and raccoon-skin masks. They capered about frantically, beating "gumba-boxes" with sticks and demanding gifts from their masters. Outside the slave South, the holiday spirit inflamed class issues more directly, presenting the respectable classes with the need to contain carnivalesque excess.

In early modern Europe the revelry had persisted from Christmas through Twelfth Night and beyond, often peaking at New Year's. The pattern persisted in many parts of the United States into the 1820s and '30s. Yet without the framework of social hierarchy that gave the carnivalesque subversions their meaning, the antics seemed (especially to the better sort) like a lot of dangerous hell-raising. Across the countryside, young men (and sometimes women) drank hogsheads of rum, fired muskets wildly and costumed themselves with animal pelts or the finery of the opposite sex—crossing species and gender. In New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and other cities they formed "Callithumpian" parades, which involved "shouting, singing, blowing penny-trumpets and long tin horns, beating on the kettles, firing crackers, hurling missiles, etc." Unlike the European carnival, this "freeform holiday mayhem" did not so much satirize existing authority as, in its very randomness, challenge social order itself. So the more respectable classes felt as, safely behind their bay windows, they exchanged New Year's gifts—a custom begun by the ancient Romans and revived by the Tudor aristocracy.

New Year's became a cultural battleground. As early as the 1770s, evangelical Christians challenged "the feasting and entertainments of the wicked" on the Callithumpians' own turf; they held hymn-singing "watch nights" in the streets on New Year's Eve. Longings for a middle way began to intensify among more affluent and liberal Protestants. Some, such as Washington Irving, had long lamented the lack of American holidays, seeing it as a symptom of the general barrenness of the American cultural landscape. Others, such as the Reverend Horace Bushnell, began to envision a shorter, more refined, and more domestic celebration at the end of the year, one that would remove "what is sensual and low, and very close to vice itself" in the existing Saturnalia. Gradually the focus shifted from New Year's to Christmas, for a variety of reasons.

Courtesy The Institute of Texan Cultures

SANTA CLAUS AND YOUNG FRIENDS, *HARPER'S WEEKLY*, DECEMBER 25, 1858

By the 1830s and 1840s, Protestant theology was becoming more Christ-centered and more child-centered. German scholarship had established the historical existence of Jesus; childbirth was becoming a rarer, more special event among the Victorian middle and upper classes. With a declining birthrate, more fortunate parents were able to lavish more attention and more resources on each individual child. Children (along with their mothers) became icons of domestic sentimentality. Liberal Protestants reshaped religion in accordance with these new preoccupations: "religion loves too much the plays and pleasures of childhood, to limit or suppress them by any kind of needless austerity," Bushnell wrote. Christmas offered the opportunity to abandon "needless austerity" by linking religion and children's play.

By mid-century, the process of embourgeoisement was well underway. Within a very few decades, the holiday would be sanitized and feminized, leather aprons and muddy boots would be supplanted by waistcoats and crinolines, the people out of doors would be disbanded, reformed and brought to the domestic hearthside. It would be possible to dwell on the class blinders of the bourgeois Christmas. American Christmas cards, unlike their English counterparts, lacked any references to

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contemporary poverty. The American Christmas carols that proliferated between 1840 and 1880 ("It Came Upon a Midnight Clear," "We Three Kings," "O Little Town of Bethlehem" and others) emphasized mythic resonance rather than social realism, as in the English "please put a penny in the old man's hat." Americans, according to Restad, preferred "music that resonated with the strains of American optimism and avoided the mire of history and social condition." When they were confronted with the mire, they stepped nimbly aside. Consider Frank Woolworth, the department store king who made a fortune selling glass tree ornaments. On a buying trip to Lauscha, Germany, he threaded his way through the "dirty hovels" where the glassworkers and their families lived eight to a room. He was disgusted, but otherwise unmoved.

However repellent the promoters of the bourgeois Christmas sometimes may have been, the holiday was more than an exercise in denial. Secular conversion narratives, such as Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, had some effect. Gift-giving reinforced philanthropy, even if it was only extended to "worthy paupers" (mostly women and children); it was also a way of reinforcing kin and community ties in a society given over to a corrosive market ethos of "root, hog, or die." The rituals and the symbols of the emerging Christmas expressed an abundance of cultural meanings.

Few symbols were more important than Santa Claus. He appeared with increasing frequency from the 1820s (when Clement Moore's "A Visit from St. Nicholas" was first published) to the 1860s (when the cartoonist Thomas Nast immortalized His Corpulence in *Harper's Weekly*). He was truly a carnivalesque figure—"one of the 'raging beasts of the mummers' world'"—covered with animal pelts, his gut overhanging his enormous belt. Yet he was successfully, if awkwardly, domesticated. Indeed, he became a kind of anti-patriarch, embodying both Christlike and "feminine" traits. About 1875, a New York department store printed "Annie and Willie's Prayer" on the back of a Nast image of Santa Claus; according to Schmidt, "the children's invocation of a gentle Jesus and an indulgent Santa Claus breaks the 'stern heart' of a cold, angry father who, softened, learns to purchase presents for his children with glad abandon." Santa Claus subverted Calvinist patriarchy. He also undermined the possessive individualist impulse toward accumulation. "A robber baron in reverse," in Restad's phrase, he was the genius of creative prodigality, presiding over the annual potlatch of the American bourgeoisie.

By the end of the century, on every street corner, the lion of commerce was lying down with the lamb of Christianity. In 1898, the advertising trade journal *Printers' Ink* noticed an extraordinary model of a church in a New York shop window, ten feet by four feet, with a tower and arched entrance, snow-covered grounds and stained glass windows with light streaming through them. "But the wonderful part of the show is that the church is built entirely of lace handkerchiefs." Christian symbols had become part of a "show" used to sell commodities.

Which did not necessarily mean that they had lost their religious significance. In many cases the impresarios of the spectacle were sincere, believing Christians. Consider John Wanamaker. Every Christmas, beginning in the 1910s, he transformed the Grand Court of his Philadelphia department store into a virtual cathedral, complete with the largest pipe organ in the world. The practice continued after his death in 1922, well into the 1950s. And judging by their ecstatic correspondence to the store, which Schmidt quotes effectively, many shoppers had what could be described as a religious experience in the Grand Court. Writing in 1949, one man found his heart "strangely warmed" as he sang carols there amid the "reverent throng," feeling "the tie of brotherhood" to these strangers. It was "as if 'Someone, whom I shall not name,' had 'turned a switch' and sent 'the happy current of Christmas' through this 'sea of faces.'"

The evangelical tradition of a personal God and close-knit community had faded into impersonality. The event was sponsored by John Wanamaker (and Philadelphia Electric) rather than John Wesley. Yet who could deny the genuineness of the moment, for all its fleeting anonymity? The rise of a "spectacle of spirituality" was not simply a bait-and-switch scheme concocted by wily merchants. Customers demanded a mix of sacred and profane, and merchants struggled to keep up. The commercial Christmas developed into a "tangle of piety and plenty."

Unraveling that tangle is not easy. Schmidt unearths and deftly interprets the diaries of some middle-class women from the second half of the nineteenth century. Some fit the model of the jaded consumer, their experience of Christmas embittered by "the tincture of unmet desire," or simply by the weariness of fighting the crowds down-

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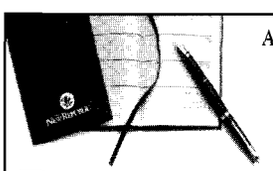

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town on obligatory errands. For many more of these women, however, the holiday was an opportunity to reaffirm familial ties; for parents, a chance to play Santa Claus—to give gifts without thought of reciprocation. (The temptation could be dangerous if taken too literally. In New Castle, Pennsylvania, in 1893, a well-intentioned paterfamilias climbed down his chimney with a sack of presents on Christmas Eve and remained stuck there until neighbors could rescue him; his cries for help had frightened his family from their home.) Those who had recently lost children could only go through the motions: "Am so thankful my Christmas work is over now," Elizabeth Merchant of New York wrote in 1870. "It has become a duty now, instead of a pleasure, as it used to be when I had precious Charlie with me." Yet fifteen years later she recorded with obvious satisfaction that another son, home from college, "came down & opened his stocking on my bed, as he has always done."

These family rituals were at the heart of the holiday, coexisting (sometimes clumsily) with spiritual devotion. Mary Knowlton described Christmas 1905, when her son John "took the part of Santa Claus" and handed out presents from around the tree. Sandwiched in the middle of her account was this sentence: "Christmas is the day, above every other day in the year to be celebrated, when Christ our blessed Saviour was born a babe in Bethlehem and knew all that was to come, to secure eternal life to a sinful world. Presents have been well distributed by members of the different families."

This sort of juxtaposition leads Schmidt to larger conclusions regarding the role of religion in American lives. Contrary to the tradition spawned by Max Weber, Schmidt argues that there has been "no sweeping march of secularization, but instead a dance of the sacred and the secular, sometimes graceful, sometimes awkward." There is a lot to recommend this view. The Protestant reclamation of Christmas was a sacralization of what had been (at least in the United States) a bawdy and secular holiday. It was, if not an invention of tradition, a pastiche of existing ones in the light of new romantic sensibilities that sanctified Jesus, childhood and family. These sensibilities affected Catholics as well as Protestants. For all, Christmas—like the idealized domestic circle—posed a redemptive counterpoint to a self-seeking market society. Yet the institutions of that society provided the agents of redemption, the gifts. Commerce served Christianity as well as vice versa.

Even today, Schmidt concludes, the marketplace is not a "naked public square" (in the words of Richard John Neuhaus), at least not at Christmas. It is full of carolers as well as merchants hawking their wares. That, of course, is precisely the problem, not only for militant secularists such as Alexander Portnoy but also for the many Muslims, Jews and other non-Christians who feel surrounded by alien schlock. Granting the legitimacy of their discomfort, it is still possible to see the American Christmas as a version of carnival. It provides not only an excuse for mindless excess, but also a meeting ground for sacred and profane.

So why the persistent lamentations of decline? Ineradicable nostalgia for a past that never was? A neo-Calvinist obsession with recovering a pristine faith? Or is Christmas being made to bear the burden of a broader disease? As Schmidt observes, modern Christmas fables such as *Miracle on 34th Street* try to have it both ways: to celebrate the possibilities of commercial festivity while they indulge "a theme at the heart of the modern Christmas—the romantic longing for enchantment in the face of the disenchanting forces of the Enlightenment and a market economy."

Since at least the 1890s, Santa has had some heavy metaphysical burdens to bear in his pack. In 1897, Frank Church of *The New York Sun* received a letter from a girl named Virginia O'Hanlon, asking the straightforward question: "Is there a Santa Claus?" Like everything else about Christmas, his answer has become a cliché. And like some other clichés, it is worth a closer look. "Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus," Church wrote, and then launched into a revealing exposition of the nature of belief, a blend of

Tolstoi Writing Anna Karenina

Inside the Winter Palace, women speak
French, walk from one room to another where light
pumps from chandeliers and servants scuffle
to open and close doors. There is the sound

of woodwinds down the hall, a bassoon and oboe.
It is winter. Russia late in the century.
Women are dancing. A train carrying coal
runs from Moscow to St. Petersburg.

Evening unfolds. The hills beyond the lake
darken and shrivel like rotting pears.
And if night were something audible,
it would sound like snow sliding off the trees.

Even death is beautiful here.
This is the privilege of fiction.
Tolstoi sits beside a darkened window in the house
where he was born, writing a novel he'd like to abandon.

In the middle of the night he slips
into his wife's bedroom. She's facing the window, pressing
her breasts against the cold, opaque glass
melting two small circles in the ice.

Or, perhaps she's already asleep on the bed,
her breasts are heavy and sag
from her chest, and he presses them between his palms,
as if kneading bread.

It is the longest night of the year.
And in the morning, peasants at Yasnaya Polyana
will work in darkness, their white breath
long, immaculate beards in the distance.

Tara M. Fenlon

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Jonathan Edwards and William James. Virginia's friends, who denied Santa Claus, had been corrupted by the skepticism of the age: "they do not believe except they see." They do not realize that "in this great universe of ours man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect as compared with the boundless world about him"; they do not acknowledge the reality—or the psychic necessity—of the unseen. Without Santa, "there would be no childlike faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence," he argued. Like Edwards, Church affirmed that "the most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see"; like James, he admitted that without those things, life would be unbearable.

Church's editorial nicely limned the religious dimensions of the modern Christmas, their weaknesses as well as their strengths. The association of Christmas with "childlike faith" reinforced the modern tendency to link religious belief with a touchingly naïve but intellectually immature stage of personal and cultural development. It implicitly infantilized religious beliefs while explicitly exalting them. And it located them in a fondly remembered past of warmth and plenty. But a past it truly was. The childishness of Christmas made it a focus for an adult nostalgia that often had cosmic overtones: "out of the great bulk of the giving the soul has gone," lamented the *Sunday School Times* in 1912, voicing a sentiment repeated endlessly before and since. Once, when we were children, things were different: Romantics have long assumed this.

Haunted by this sense of loss, many Americans continue to search for the elusive "spirit of Christmas." It is a quest likely to continue for a long time, and for all its occasional sentimentality it can yet command respect. Still, as these books remind us, there is an alternative way of seeing Christmas, one that is rooted in both incarnational and carnivalesque traditions. Toys-R-Us is not the best place to recall it, but the American Protestant appropriation of Christmas may have been a revolt against the dualism of spirit and matter, an attempt to recover a more sacramental conception of the world. From such a perspective, the mystery of faith may not always be hidden by the mountains of things; it may also live, however infrequently and ineffably, in the things themselves.

JACKSON LEARS is the author most recently of *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (Basic Books).

TRB *continued from page 4*

makes its color-blind jurisprudence especially slippery.

In the *Miller* case last June, Justice Kennedy announced that only "traditional race-neutral districting principles, including but not limited to compactness, contiguity, and respect for political subdivisions or communities defined by actual shared interests," will pass constitutional muster. But there is something suspiciously selective about Kennedy's list of "traditional districting principles." In fact, race was *not* the "predominant factor" in the minds of the Democratic state legislators who created the oddly shaped districts in Texas and North Carolina; if it had been, the districts could have been as compact and graceful as Fabergé eggs. Instead, the legislators were trying to balance four distinct and largely irreconcilable goals: first, complying with the Supreme Court's one-man-one-vote requirement, which means drawing districts with precisely equal numbers of voters; second, complying with the Voting Rights Amendments of 1982, which means creating districts where blacks and Hispanics constitute a majority; third, protecting white Democratic incumbents, which means retaining their base of loyal black voters; and, finally, creating districts that are relatively compact, which means drawing shapes that strike Justice O'Connor as pretty rather than "bizarre."

Even a cartographer with the skills of Magellan can't achieve all four of these goals at the same time. By exalting the aesthetic virtues of neatly shaped districts, and refusing to relax the one-man-one-vote requirement, the Supreme Court has implicitly forced state legislatures to sacrifice the other two goals—namely, protecting Democratic incumbents and complying with the Voting Rights Act.

But where in the Constitution does it say that creating pleasantly shaped districts is a "traditional districting principle," but protecting incumbents isn't? Nowhere. In fact, only a generation ago, the Burger Court reached precisely the opposite conclusion. In 1973, the Court declared that incumbency protection was a long tradition in American politics, and it might justify minor population variations among the districts. During the same year, the Court said explicitly that "a State's preference for pleasingly shaped districts can hardly justify population variations." The only thing that has changed between 1973 and 1995 is the composition of the Court.

By the next Census, of course, the Republican realignment may be so far advanced that the GOP will control the Southern state legislatures and, with them, the next round of redistricting. "Soon we'll be able to do the good old-fashioned kind of gerrymandering which involves protecting your incumbents," says conservative strategist Grover Norquist. "Democrats obsess about race. We don't." Not this decade, anyway. And perhaps after the new districts are drawn in the new millennium, the conservative justices will suddenly decide that protecting incumbents is a "traditional districting principle" after all.

JEFFREY ROSEN

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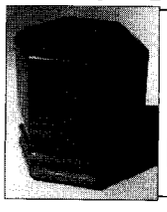
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HUDSON RIVER DIARIST

Ho ho Silver

I WAS TRYING HARD NOT TO BE impressed when the real estate agent pointed through a forest filled with trees I could not identify to a yellow wood farmhouse and said, "That's Ron Silver's place." My wife and I were standing with her on the porch of a cottage overlooking the Hudson River, wondering whether this, only the third place we had seen, was the retreat from the city we so badly desired. We fell silent together. "Ron Silver the actor?" I asked. "The guy who played Dershowitz?" asked my wife. The realtor nodded. I was unable to suppress the same tiny surge of validation that I feel upon discovering a celebrity in my restaurant, airplane, hotel or retail outlet. The presence of a celebrity, I find, offers an added measure of security when shopping. A celebrity can have anything he wants; what he chooses to buy passes through an unthinkably selective vetting process. And so whatever doubts I might have had about the Sugar Shack—as the house had been dubbed for the cocaine consumed by previous occupants—dwindled to nothing. If it was good enough for Ron Silver to live next door to, it was good enough for me. The next day we bought it.

FOR THE NEXT YEAR RON SILVER played a small but important role in our lives. The first neighbors who came to dinner whispered conspiratorially that we were living next door to the guy who had played the killer in *Blue Steel*. We knew that, of course, though we could not honestly claim to have seen it or him. A couple of times a week I walked by the white mailbox with SILVER painted in bright red letters and wondered if Ron was home. Others who had seen him spoke enthusiastically of the experience. The 11-year-old girl across the road said she had spotted Ron Silver walking down our country road hand in hand with a beautiful woman. That, we knew, was the former Miss America for whom Ron had reportedly left his first wife. The waiter at our favorite restaurant told us how Ron Silver came in from time to time; once, he said, we missed him by only a few hours. The man at the hardware store told me how a couple of years before he had sold Ron Silver a hammer. After a few weeks we realized that Ron Silver had literally put us on the local map. When asked where we lived by people she met in town, my wife would answer, "next to Ron Silver's place." Her interlocutor invariably knew exactly where that was.

I SHOULD SAY THAT OUR VILLAGE is not the sort of place you would expect to care much for Ron Silver. Our neighbors are unillusioned people with narrowing eyes and Republican bumper stickers. Many of them work in the prisons just north and south of our town; our county, truth be told, is something of a penal colony. But lifelong residents of the Upper West Side would be hard pressed to feel as warmly toward the famously liberal actor. There was a local pride in knowing Ron Silver's house; everyone had seen him around town at least once; everyone felt they knew him just a little. Ron Silver was our village's answer to Kevin Kline, who was widely reputed to own a house in the more pretentious village next door.

I CAME TO ACCEPT IT AS PART OF the business of living next door to Ron Silver that we never laid eyes on him. His absence even gave me something of a social edge over the only other person in town who had not seen Ron Silver, my wife. Unlike her, I actually had met him. Perhaps five years ago we sat improbably close together at a dinner party thrown by a couple whom I'll call the Buchanans. He spoke to me without once pulling rank, much as if I were someone worthy of his time. Ron Silver was a great guy! I can honestly say that. Every now and then my wife would casually mention that we should knock on his door and ask him to dinner, as if it were no big deal, as if he were just another country neighbor. Her proposal always lingered in the air for a few moments after she made it, awaiting my ultimate decision. For I was the authority on Ron Silver. And I would not have dreamed of actually doing such a thing. Under no circumstances, I explained to my wife, would I be mistaken for one of those star-fuckers Ron Silver was avoiding by not having his country house in the Hamptons.

ONLY ONCE DID I EXPLOIT MY connection to him. On behalf of a friend with a great deal of promise I stuffed into Ron Silver's mailbox a movie script about the Six-Day War. (I envisioned him as a swashbuckling Israeli tank commander.) And only once did I do anything that might be interpreted as an invasion of Ron Silver's privacy. It was, however, terrible. After six months of living next door to Ron Silver I bumped into the Buchanans at a party in Manhattan—for the first time since the dinner party at their house—and mentioned my new situation. They quickly became agitated, particularly Mrs. Buchanan. It emerged that the Buchanans were still upset that Ron had left his wife for the former Miss America, and had taken the side of the first Mrs. Silver in the divorce. Their voices dripped with suspicion as they asked me about Ron Silver's property. I described its ten lush acres, its sculpture garden, its large warm house reputedly chock-full of masterpieces. Then they came clean: Ron Silver had never disclosed his ownership of the property in his divorce settlement.

I NEVER FOUND OUT WHETHER Ron Silver ever got a call from his ex-wife's lawyer. But a few days later we heard through the grapevine that Ron Silver had rented his place. On the one hand we were crestfallen; on the other, it suddenly seemed safe to stop by and ask the neighbors to dinner. This I duly did. And on the appointed evening they turned up full of joy and good cheer and without the slightest hint of pretension, as one would expect from Ron Silver's tenants. We gave them drinks and let them settle in before we finally asked the obvious question: What was it like to rent a house from Ron Silver? They turned toward each other with blank looks. "*Ron* Silver?" asked the pleasant middle-aged woman. "We rent from David Silver." Ron's brother perhaps? I suggested. No luck. A distant cousin. "No," she said, "someone else asked us this. David Silver is no relation whatsoever to Ron Silver."

AS I WRITE THESE FINAL WORDS I am looking through a stand of sugar maples at the house that does not belong to Ron Silver. I wonder what Ron Silver is doing right now and whether he knows how many lives he has changed. I sincerely hope that I did not complicate his divorce settlement. If I did, I am truly sorry. No, Ron Silver doesn't live next door or anywhere nearby; though he is, of course, welcome to visit anytime. I suspect that if he ever does he will feel strangely at home.

MICHAEL LEWIS

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Teaching in the Global Classroom

Madeline Reich, working with students from a Japanese middle school, found many similarities between Japanese and American children.

Teachers Exchange Fosters Understanding

When visiting American teacher Judy Diashyn walked into a Japanese classroom for the first time to teach a class, she wasn't quite sure what to expect. But then, the children turned to look at her, and all she saw was a sea of smiling faces. "I felt as if I were back home in America," recalls Diashyn, who teaches history at Mercy High School in Burlingame, California. "This was my classroom, and these were my students."

Diashyn was a participant in the annual U.S./Japan Teachers Exchange Program sponsored by Hitachi. Now in its eighth year, the exchange aims to promote mutual understanding, cultural awareness, and friendship between U.S. and Japanese citizens.

Since 1987, 60 teachers have participated in the program. For up to three weeks, participants teach in local schools, see the sights, and live with local residents.

"There is no better way to dispel misconceptions that Japanese and Americans have about each other than to spend time in each others' country," says Koichi Ueno, president of Hitachi America, Ltd. "We are glad to make this possible for Japanese and American teachers, and through them, their students."

Diashyn agrees. "My visit was the opportunity of a lifetime," she says. "It enabled me to personalize my teaching, to make Japan come alive for my students in a way that was not possible when my knowledge of Japan came only through textbooks."

A day-long visit by a group of Japanese teachers made a strong impact on students at the Winfield L. Morse School in North Tarrytown, N.Y. During the visit, the guests showed the students a video tape of a Japanese school. The next day, when Robert Cavaliero, the school's principal, entered a third grade classroom, the students stood, bowed, and greeted him in unison just as they had seen Japanese students greet their teachers in the video. "The kids were so impressed by the respect that Japanese children show for their teachers that they felt moved to do the same," he says.

For Madeline Reich, an English literature teacher at the New York School for the Deaf, the biggest surprise of the visit was not the differences between East and West but the similarities, particularly among children. For example, she observed that Japanese hearing impaired children prefer sign language just like their American counterparts even though Japanese schools emphasize oral communication. "As soon as the teachers turned their backs, the kids were signing away furiously," she recalls, adding, "It seems kids are the same all over."

Judy Diasyhn visited Japan as part of the Teachers Exchange

Hitachi is proud to sponsor the Teachers Exchange Program. We believe it is making a significant contribution to greater friendship and understanding between our countries.

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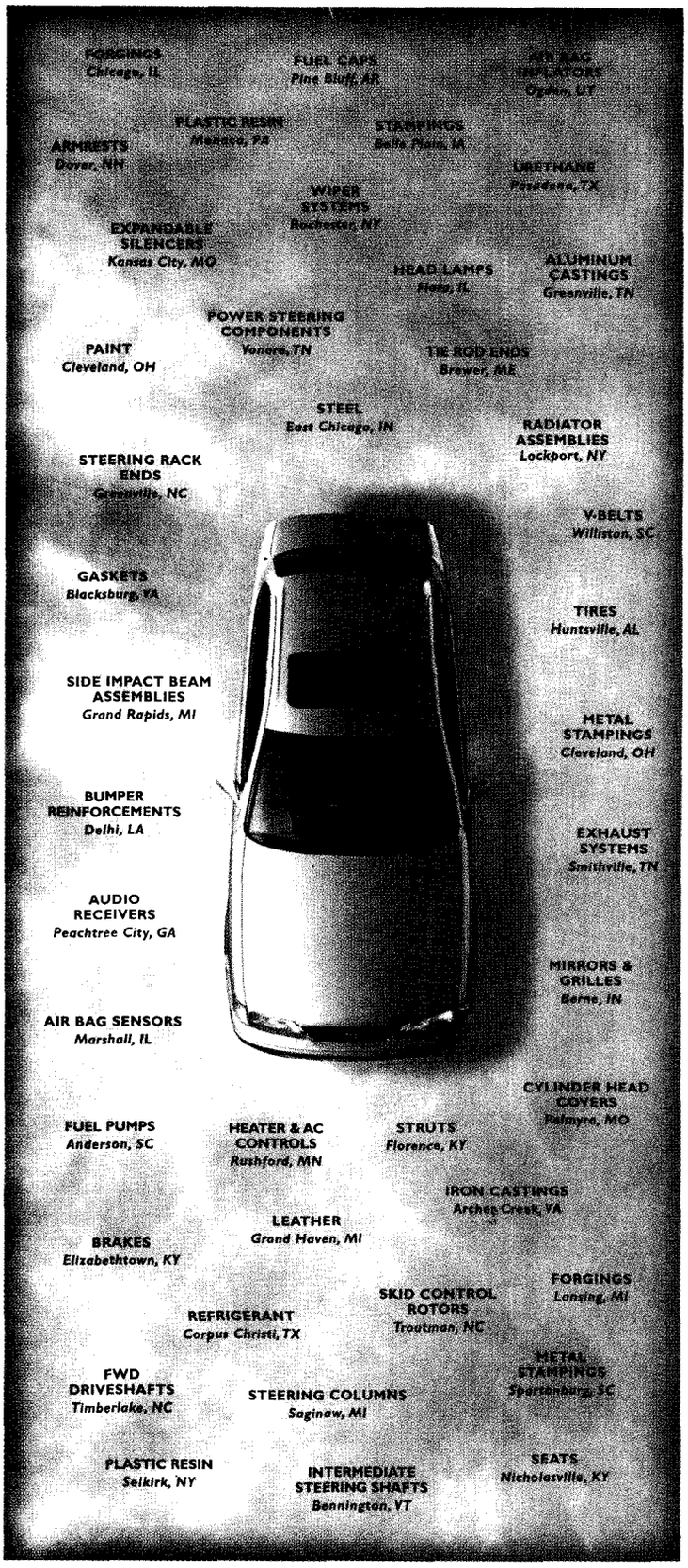

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